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THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO
ST. MATTHEW

CHAPTERS XVIII. TO XXVIII.

BY

ALEXANDER MACLAREN

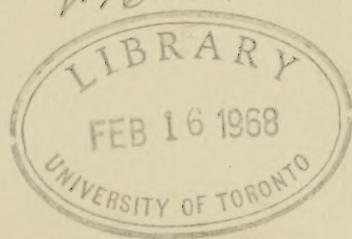
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CONTENTS

	PAGE
THE LAW OF PRECEDENCE IN THE KINGDOM (Matt. xviii. 1-14)	1
SELF-MUTILATION FOR SELF-PRESERVATION (Matt. xviii. 8, R.V.)	9
THE LOST SHEEP AND THE SEEKING SHEPHERD (Matt. xviii. 12)	19
THE PERSISTENCE OF THWARTED LOVE (Matt. xviii. 13; Luke xv. 4)	29
FORGIVEN AND UNFORGIVING (Matt. xviii. 22)	37
THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE KING (Matt. xix. 16-26)	46
NEAREST TO CHRIST (Matt. xx. 23)	56
THE SERVANT-LORD AND HIS SERVANTS (Matt. xx. 28)	71
WHAT THE HISTORIC CHRIST TAUGHT ABOUT HIS DEATH (Matt. xx. 28)	80

	PAGE
THE COMING OF THE KING TO HIS PALACE (Matt. xxi. 1-16)	89
A NEW KIND OF KING (Matt. xxi. 4, 5)	97
THE VINEYARD AND ITS KEEPERS (Matt. xxi. 33-46)	107
THE STONE OF STUMBLING (Matt. xxi. 44)	116
TWO WAYS OF DESPISING GOD'S FEAST (Matt. xxii. 1-14)	126
THE TABLES TURNED: THE QUESTIONERS QUESTIONED (Matt. xxii. 34-46)	135
THE KING'S FAREWELL (Matt. xxiii. 27-39)	139
TWO FORMS OF ONE SAYING (Matt. xxiv. 13, R.V. ; Luke xxi. 19)	148
THE CARRION AND THE VULTURES (Matt. xxiv. 28)	157
WATCHING FOR THE KING (Matt. xxiv. 42-51)	166
THE WAITING MAIDENS (Matt. xxv. 1-13)	175
DYING LAMPS (Matt. xxv. 8)	181
'THEY THAT WERE READY' (Matt. xxv. 10)	189
TRADERS FOR THE MASTER (Matt. xxv. 14-30)	195
WHY THE TALENT WAS BURIED (Matt. xxv. 24, 25)	205

CONTENTS

vii

PAGE

THE KING ON HIS JUDGMENT THRONE (Matt. xxv. 31-46) .	213
THE DEFENCE OF UNCALCULATING LOVE (Matt. xxvi. 6-16)	221
THE NEW PASSOVER (Matt. xxvi. 17-30)	225
‘IS IT I?’ (Matt. xxvi. 22, 25; John xiii. 25)	232
‘THIS CUP’ (Matt. xxvi. 27, 28)	243
‘UNTIL THAT DAY’ (Matt. xxvi. 29)	252
GETHSEMANE, THE OIL-PRESS (Matt. xxvi. 36-46)	261
THE LAST PLEADING OF LOVE (Matt. xxvi. 50)	270
THE REAL HIGH PRIEST AND HIS COUNTERFEIT (Matt. xxvi. 57-68)	286
JESUS CHARGED WITH BLASPHEMY (Matt. xxvi. 65)	290
‘SEE THOU TO THAT!’ (Matt. xxvii. 4, 24)	299
THE SENTENCE WHICH CONDEMNED THE JUDGES (Matt. xxvii. 11-26)	310
THE CRUCIFIXION (Matt. xxvii. 33-50)	317
THE BLIND WATCHERS AT THE CROSS (MATT. xxvii. 36)	325

	PAGE
TAUNTS TURNING TO TESTIMONIES (Matt. xxvii. 41-43)	332
THE VEIL RENT (Matt. xxvii. 51)	341
THE PRINCE OF LIFE (Matt. xxviii. 1-15)	350
THE RISEN LORD'S GREETINGS AND GIFTS (Matt. xxviii. 9: John xx. 19)	360
ON THE MOUNTAIN (Matt. xxviii. 16, 17; 1 Cor. xv. 6)	369

THE LAW OF PRECEDENCE IN THE KINGDOM

'At the same time came the disciples unto Jesus, saying, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? 2. And Jesus called a little child unto Him, and set him in the midst of them, 3. And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. 4. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven. 5. And whoso shall receive one such little child in My name receiveth Me. 6. But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in Me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea. 7. Woe unto the world because of offences! for it must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh! 8. Wherefore if thy hand or thy foot offend thee, cut them off, and cast them from thee; it is better for thee to enter into life halt or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet to be cast into everlasting fire. 9. And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire. 10. Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of My Father which is in heaven. 11. For the Son of Man is come to save that which was lost. 12. How think ye? if a man have an hundred sheep, and one of them be gone astray, doth he not leave the ninety and nine, and goeth into the mountains, and seeketh that which is gone astray? 13. And if so be that he find it, verily I say unto you, he rejoiceth more of that sheep, than of the ninety and nine which went not astray. 14. Even so it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish.'—MATT. xviii. 1-14.

MARK tells us that the disciples, as they journeyed, had been squabbling about pre-eminence in the kingdom, and that this conversation was brought on by our Lord's question as to the subject of their dispute. It seems at first sight to argue singular insensibility that the first effect of His reiterated announcement of His sufferings should have been their quarrelling for the lead; but their behaviour is intelligible if we suppose that they regarded the half-understood prophecies of His passion as indicating the commencement of the short conflict which was to end in His Messianic reign. So it was time for them to be getting ready and settling precedence. The form of their question, in

Matthew, connects it with the miracle of the coin in the fish's mouth, in which there was a very plain assertion of Christ's royal dignity, and a distinguishing honour given to Peter. Probably the 'then' of the question means, Since Peter is thus selected, are we to look to him as foremost? Their conception of the kingdom and of rank in it is frankly and entirely earthly. There are to be graded dignities, and these are to depend on His mere will. Our Lord not only answers the letter of their question, but cuts at the root of the temper which inspired it.

I. He shows the conditions of entrance into and eminence in His kingdom by a living example. There were always children at hand round Him, when He wanted them. Their quick instinct for pure and loving souls drew them to Him; and this little one was not afraid to be taken by the hand, and to be afterwards caught up in His arms, and pressed to His heart. One does not wonder that the legend that he was Ignatius the martyr should have been current; for surely the remembrance of that tender clasping arm and gentle breast would not fade nor be fruitless. The disciples had made very sure that they were to be in the kingdom, and that the only question concerning them was how high up in it they were each to be. Christ's answer is like a dash of cold water to that confidence. It is, in effect, 'Greatest in the kingdom! Make sure that you go in at all, first; which you will never do, so long as you keep your present ambitious minds.'

Verse 3 lays down the condition of entrance into the kingdom, from which necessarily follows the condition of supremacy in it. What a child is naturally, and without effort or merit, by reason of age and position, we must become, if we are to pass the narrow portal

which admits into the large room. That 'becoming' is impossible without a revolution in us. 'Be converted' is corrected, in the Revised Version, into 'turn,' and rightly; for there is in the word a distinct reference to the temper of the disciples as displayed by their question. As long as they cherished it they could not even get inside, to say nothing of winning promotion to dignities in the kingdom. Their very question condemned them as incapable of entrance. So there must be a radical change, not unaccompanied, of course, with repentance, but mainly consisting in the substitution of the child's temper for theirs. What is the temper thus enjoined? We are to see here neither the entirely modern and shallow sentimental way of looking at childhood, in which popular writers indulge, nor the doctrine of its innocence. It is not Christ's teaching, either that children are innocent, or that men enter the kingdom by making themselves so. But the child is, by its very position, lowly and modest, and makes no claims, and lives by instinctive confidence, and does not care about honours, and has these qualities which in us are virtues, and is not puffed up by possessing them. That is the ideal which is realised more generally in the child than analogous ideals are in mature manhood. Such simplicity, modesty, humility, must be ours. We must be made small ere we can enter that door. And as is the requirement for entrance, so is it for eminence. The child does not humble himself, but is humble by nature; but we must humble ourselves if we would be great.

Christ implies that there are degrees in the kingdom. It has a nobility, but of such a kind that there may be many greatest; for the principle of rank there is lowliness. We rise by sinking. The deeper our conscious-

ness of our own unworthiness and weakness, the more capable are we of receiving the divine gifts, and therefore the more fully shall we receive them. Rivers run in the hollows; the mountain-tops are dry. God works with broken reeds, and the princes in His realm are beggars taken from the dunghill. A lowliness which made itself lowly for the sake of eminence would miss its aim, for it would not be lowliness. The desire to be foremost must be cast out, in order that it may be fulfilled.

II. The question has been answered, and our Lord passes to other thoughts rising out of His answer. Verses 5 and 6 set forth antithetically our duties to His little ones. He is not now speaking of the child who served as a living parable to answer the question, but of men who have made themselves like the child, as is plain from the emphatic 'one *such* child,' and from verse 6 ('which *believe* on Me').

The subject, then, of these verses is the blessedness of recognising and welcoming Christlike lowly believers, and the fatal effect of the opposite conduct. To 'receive one such little child in My name' is just to have a sympathetic appreciation of, and to be ready to welcome to heart and home, those who are lowly in their own and in the world's estimate, but princes of Christ's court and kingdom. Such welcome and furtherance will only be given by one who himself has the same type of character in some degree. He who honours and admires a certain kind of excellence has the roots of it in himself. A possible artist lies in him who thrills at the sight or hearing of fair things painted or sung. Our admiration is an index of our aspiration, and our aspiration is a prophecy of our attainment. So it will be a little one's heart which

will welcome the little ones, and a lover of Christ who receives them in His name. The reception includes all forms of sympathy and aid. 'In My name' is equivalent to 'for the sake of My revealed character,' and refers both to the receiver and to the received. The blessedness of such reception, so far as the receiver is concerned, is not merely that he thereby comes into happy relations with Christ's foremost servants, but that he gets Christ Himself into his heart. If with true appreciation of the beauty of such a childlike disposition, I open my heart or my hand to its possessor, I do thereby enlarge my capacity for my own possession of Christ, who dwells in His child, and who comes with him where He is welcomed. There is no surer way of securing Him for our own than the loving reception of His children. Whoso lodges the King's favourites will not be left unvisited by the King. To recognise and reverence the greatest in the kingdom is to be oneself a member of their company, and a sharer in their prerogatives.

On the other hand, the antithesis of 'receiving' is 'causing to stumble,' by which is meant giving occasion for moral fall. That would be done by contests about pre-eminence, by arrogance, by non-recognition. The atmosphere of carnality and selfishness in which the disciples were moving, as their question showed, would stifle the tender life of any lowly believer who found himself in it; and they were not only injuring themselves, but becoming stumbling-blocks to others, by their ambition. How much of the present life of average Christians is condemned on the same ground! It is a good test of our Christian character to ask—would it help or hinder a lowly believer to live beside us? How many professing Christians are really,

though unconsciously, doing their utmost to pull down their more Christlike brethren to their own low level! The worldliness and selfish ambitions of the Church are responsible for the stumbling of many who would else have been of Christ's 'little ones.' But perhaps we are rather to think of deliberate and consciously laid stumbling-blocks. Knowingly to try to make a good man fall, or to stain a more than usually pure Christian character, is surely the very height of malice, and presupposes such a deadly hatred of goodness and of Christ that no fate can be worse than the possession of such a temper. To be flung into the sea, like a dog, with a stone round his neck, would be better for a man than to live to do such a thing. The deed itself, apart from any other future retribution, is its own punishment; yet our Lord's solemn words not only point to such a future retribution, which is infinitely more terrible than the miserable fate described would be for the body, but to the consequences of the act, as so bad in its blind hatred of the highest type of character, and in its conscious preference of evil, as well as so fatal in its consequences, that it were better to die drowned than to live so.

III. Verses 10-14 set forth the honour and dignity of Christ's 'little ones.' Clearly the application of the designation in these closing verses is exclusively to His lowly followers. The warning not to despise them is needed at all times, and, perhaps, seldom more, even by Christians, than now, when so many causes induce a far too high estimate of the world's great ones, and modest, humble godliness looks as dull and sober as some russet-coated little bird among gorgeous cockatoos and birds of paradise. The world's standard is only too current in the Church; and it needs a spirit

kept in harmony with Christ's spirit, and some degree of the child-nature in ourselves, to preserve us from overlooking the delicate hidden beauties and unworldly greatness of His truest disciples.

The exhortation is enforced by two considerations,—a glimpse into heaven, and a parable. Fair interpretation can scarcely deny that Christ here teaches that His children are under angel-guardianship. We should neither busy ourselves in curious inferences from His reticent words, nor try to blink their plain meaning, but rather mark their connection and purpose here. He has been teaching that pre-eminence belongs to the childlike spirit. He here opens a door into the court of the heavenly King, and shows us that, as the little ones are foremost in the kingdom of heaven, so the angels who watch over them are nearest the throne in heaven itself. The representation is moulded on the usages of Eastern courts, and similar language in the Old Testament describes the principal courtiers as 'the men who see the King's face continually.' So high is the honour in which the little ones are held, that the highest angels are set to guard them, and whatever may be thought of them on earth, the loftiest of creatures are glad to serve and keep them.

Following the Revised Version we omit verse 11. If it were genuine, the connection would be that such despising contradicted the purpose of Christ's mission; and the 'for' would refer back to the injunction, not to the glimpse into heaven which enforced it.

The exhortation is further confirmed by the parable of the ninety and nine, which is found, slightly modified in form and in another connection, in Luke xv. Its point here is to show the importance of the little ones as the objects of the seeking love of God, and as so

precious to Him that their recovery rejoices His heart. Of course, if verse 11 be genuine, the Shepherd is Christ; but, if we omit it, the application of the parable in verse 14 as illustrating the loving will of God becomes more direct. In that case God is the owner of the sheep. Christ does not emphasise His own love or share in the work, reference to which was not relevant to His purpose, but, leaving that in shadow, casts all the light on the loving divine will, which counts the little ones as so precious that, if even one of them wanders, all heaven's powers are sent forth to find and recover it. The reference does not seem to be so much to the one great act by which, in Christ's incarnation and sacrifice, a sinful world has been sought and redeemed, as to the numberless acts by which God, in His providence and grace, restores the souls of those humble ones if ever they go astray. For the connection requires that the wandering sheep here should, when it wanders, be 'one of these little ones'; and the parable is introduced to illustrate the truth that, because they belong to that number, the least of them is too precious to God to be allowed to wander away and be lost. They have for their keepers the angels of the presence; they have God Himself, in His yearning love and manifold methods of restoration, to look for them, if ever they are lost, and to bring them back to the fold. Therefore, 'see that ye despise not one of these little ones,' each of whom is held by the divine will in the grasp of an individualising love which nothing can loosen.

SELF-MUTILATION FOR SELF-PRESERVATION

'If thy hand or thy foot causeth thee to stumble, cut it off, and cast it from thee.'—MATT. xviii. 8, R.V.

No person or thing can do our characters as much harm as we ourselves can do. Indeed, none can do them any harm but ourselves. For men may put stumbling-blocks in our way, but it is we who make them stumbling-blocks. The obstacle in the path would do us no hurt if it were not for the erring foot, nor the attractive prize if it were not for the hand that itched to lay hold of it, nor the glittering bauble if it were not for the eye that kindled at the sight of it. So our Lord here, having been speaking of the men that put stumbling-blocks in the way of His little ones, draws the net closer and bids us look at home. A solemn woe of divine judgment is denounced on those who cause His followers to stumble; let us leave God to execute that, and be sure that we have no share in their guilt, but let us ourselves be the executioners of the judgment upon the things in ourselves which alone give the stumbling-blocks, which others put before us, their fatal power.

There is extraordinary energy in these words. Solemnly they are repeated twice here, verbatim; solemnly they are repeated verbatim three times in Mark's edition. The urgent stringency of the command, the terrible plainness of the alternative put forth by the lips that could say nothing harsh, and the fact that the very same injunction appears in a wholly different connection in the Sermon on the Mount, show us how profoundly important our Lord

felt the principle to be which He was here laying down.

We mark these three points. First, the case supposed, 'If thy hand or thy foot cause thee to stumble.' Then the sharp, prompt remedy enjoined, 'Cut them off and cast them from thee.' Then the solemn motive by which it is enforced, 'It is better for thee to enter into life maimed than, being a whole man, to be cast into hell-fire.'

I. First, then, as to the case supposed.

Hand and foot and eye are, of course, regarded as organs of the inward self, and symbols of its tastes and capacities. We may perhaps see in them the familiar distinction between the practical and the theoretical:—hand and foot being instruments of action, and the eye the organ of perception. Our Lord takes an extreme case. If members of the body are to be amputated and plucked out should they cause us to stumble, much more are associations to be abandoned and occupations to be relinquished and pleasures to be forsaken, if these draw us away. But it is to be noticed that the whole stringency of the commandment rests upon that *if*. '*If* they cause thee to stumble,' then, and not else, amputate. The powers are natural, the operation of them is perfectly innocent, but a man may be ruined by innocent things. And, says Christ, if that process is begun, then, and only then, does My exhortation come into force.

Now, all that solemn thought of a possible injurious issue of innocent occupations, rests upon the principles that our nature has an ideal order, so as that some parts of it are to be suppressed and some are to rule, and that there are degrees of importance in men's pursuits, and that where the lower interfere and clog the opera-

tions of the higher, there they are harmful. And so the only wisdom is to excise and cut them off.

We see illustrations in abundance every day. There are many people who are being ruined in regard to the highest purposes of their lives, simply by an over-indulgence in lower occupations which in themselves may be perfectly right. Here is a young woman that spends so much of her day in reading novels that she has no time to look after the house and help her mother. Here is a young man so given to athletics that his studies are neglected—and so you may go all round the circle, and find instances of the way in which innocent things, and the excessive or unwise exercise of natural faculties, are destroying men. And much more is that the case in regard to religion, which is the highest object of pursuit, and in regard to those capacities and powers by which we lay hold of God. These are to be ministered to by the rest, and if there be in my nature or in the order of my life something which is drawing away to itself the energy that ought to go in that other direction, then, howsoever innocent it may be, *per se*, it is harming me. It is a wen that is sucking all the vital force into itself, and turning it into poison. And there is only one cure for it, and that is the knife.

Then there is another point to be observed in this case supposed, and that is that the whole matter is left to the determination of personal experience. No one else has the right to decide for you what it is safe and wise for you to do in regard to things which are not in themselves wrong. If they are wrong in themselves, of course the consideration of consequences is out of place altogether; but if they be not wrong in themselves, then it is you that must settle whether they are

legitimate for you or not. Do not let your Christian liberty be interfered with by other people's dictation in regard to this matter. How often you hear people say, '*I could not do it*'; meaning thereby, '*therefore he ought not to do it!*' But that inference is altogether illegitimate. True, there *are* limitations of our Christian liberty in regard to things indifferent and innocent. Paul lays down the most important of these in three sentences. 'All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient.' 'All things are lawful for me, but all things edify not';—you must think of your brethren as well as of yourself. 'All things are lawful for me, yet will I not be brought under the power of any'; keep master of them, and rather abstain altogether than become their slave. But these three limitations being observed, then, in regard to all such matters, nobody else can prescribe for you or me. 'To his own Master he standeth or falleth.'

But, on the other hand, do not you be led away into things that damage you, because some other man does them, as he supposes, without injury. 'Happy is he that condemneth not himself in that thing which he alloweth.' There are some Christian people who are simply very unscrupulous and think themselves very strong; and whose consciences are not more enlightened, but less sensitive, than those of the 'narrow-minded brethren' upon whom they look askance.

And so, dear friend, you ought to take the world—to inhale it, if I may so say, as patients do chloroform; only you must be your own doctor and keep your own fingers on your pulse, and watch the first sign of failure there, and take no more. When the safety lamps begin to burn blue you may be quite sure there is choke-damp about; and when Christian men and women begin to

find prayer wearisome, and religious thoughts dull, and the remembrance of God an effort or a pain, then, whatever anybody else may do, it is time for them to pull up. 'If thy hand offend thee,' never mind though your brother's hand is not offending him, do the necessary thing for *your* health, 'cut it off and cast it from you.'

But of course there must be caution and common-sense in the application of such a principle. It does not mean that we are to abandon all things that are susceptible of abuse, for everything is so; and if we are to regulate our conduct by such a rule, it is not the amputation of a hand that will be sufficient. We may as well cut off our heads at once, and go out of the world altogether; for everything is capable of being thus abused.

Nor does the injunction mean that unconditionally we are to abandon all occupations in which there is danger. It can never be a duty to shirk a duty because it is dangerous. And sometimes it is as much a Christian man's duty to go into, and to stand in, positions that are full of temptation and danger, as it is a fireman's business to go into a burning house at the risk of suffocation. There were saints in Cæsar's household, flowers that grew on a dunghill, and they were not bidden to abandon their place because it was full of possible danger to their souls. Sometimes Christ sets His sentinels in places where the bullets fly very thick; and if we are posted in such a place—and we all are so some time or other in our lives—the only course for us is to stand our ground until the relieving guard comes, and to trust that He said a truth that was always to be true, when He sent out His servants to their dangerous work, with the assurance that if they drank any deadly thing it should not hurt them.

II. So much, then, for the first of the points here. Now a word, in the second place, as to the sharp remedy enjoined.

‘Cut it off and cast it from thee.’ Entire excision is the only safety. I myself am to be the operator in that surgery. I am to lay my hand upon the block, and with the other hand to grasp the axe and strike. That is to say, we are to suppress capacities, to abandon pursuits, to break with associates, when we find that they are damaging our spiritual life and hindering our likeness to Jesus Christ.

That is plain common-sense. In regard to physical intoxication, it is a great deal easier to abstain altogether than to take a very little and then stop. The very fumes of alcohol will sometimes drive a reclaimed drunkard into a bout of dissipation that will last for weeks; therefore, the only safety is in entire abstinence. The rule holds in regard to everyday life. Every man has to give up a great many things if he means to succeed in one, and has to be a man of one pursuit if anything worth doing is to be done. Christian men especially have to adopt that principle, and shear off a great deal that is perfectly legitimate, in order that they may keep a reserve of strength for the highest things.

True, all forms of life are capable of being made Christian service and Christian discipline, but in practice we shall find that if we are earnestly seeking the kingdom of God and His righteousness, not only shall we lose our taste for a great deal that is innocent, but we shall have, whether we lose our taste for them or not—and more imperatively if we have not lost our taste for them than if we have—to give up allowable things in order that with all our heart, and soul, and strength,

and mind, we may love and serve our Master. There are no half-measures to be kept; the only thing to do with the viper is to shake it off into the fire and let it burn there. We have to empty our hands of earth's trivialities if we would grasp Christ with them. We have to turn away our eyes from earth if we would behold the Master, and rigidly to apply this principle of excision in order that we may advance in the divine life. It is the only way to ensure progress. There is no such certain method of securing an adequate flow of sap up the trunk as to cut off all the suckers. If you wish to have a current going down the main bed of the stream, sufficient to keep it clear, you must dam up all the side channels.

But it is not to be forgotten that this commandment, stringent and necessary as it is, is second best. The man *is* maimed, although it was for Christ's sake that he cut off his hand, or put out his eye. His hand was given him that with it he might serve God, and the highest thing would have been that in hand and foot and eye he should have been anointed, like the priests of old, for the service of his Master. But until he is strong enough to use the faculty for God, the wisest thing is not to use it at all. Abandon the outworks to keep the citadel. And just as men pull down the pretty houses on the outskirts of a fortified city when a siege is impending, in order that they may afford no cover to the enemy, so we have to sweep away a great deal in our lives that is innocent and fair, in order that the foes of our spirit may find no lodgment there. It is second best, but for all that it is absolutely needful. We must lay 'aside every *weight*,' as well as 'the *sin* which so easily besets us.' We must run lightly if we would run well. We must cast aside

all burdens, even though they be burdens of treasure and delights, if we would 'run with patience the race that is set before us.' 'If thy foot offend thee,' do not hesitate, do not adopt half-measures, do not try moderation, do not seek to sanctify the use of the peccant member; all these may be possible and right in time, but for the present there is only one thing to do—down with it on the block, and off with it! 'Cut it off and cast it from thee.'

III. And now, lastly, a word as to the solemn exhortation by which this injunction is enforced.

Christ rests His command of self-denial and self-mutilation upon the highest ground of self-interest. 'It is better for thee.' We are told nowadays that this is a very low motive to appeal to, that Christianity is a religion of selfishness, because it says to men, 'Your life or your death depends upon your faith and your conduct.' Well, I think it will be time for us to listen to fantastic objections of this sort when the men that urge them refuse to turn down another street, if they are warned that in the road on which they are going they will meet their death. As long as they admit that it is a wise and a kind thing to say to a man, 'Do not go that way or your life will be endangered,' I think we may listen to our Master saying to us, 'Do not do that lest thou perish; do this, that thou may'st enter into life.'

And then, notice that a maimed man may enter into life, and a complete man may perish. The first may be a very poor creature, very ignorant, with a limited nature, undeveloped capacities, intellect and the like all but dormant in him, artistic sensibilities quite atrophied, and yet he may have got hold of Jesus Christ and His love, and be trying to love Him back again and

serve Him, and so be entering into life even here, and be sure of a life more perfect yonder. And the complete man, cultured all round, with all his faculties polished and exercised to the full, may have one side of his nature undeveloped—that which connects him with God in Christ. And so he may be like some fair tree that stands out there in the open, on all sides extending its equal beauty, with its stem symmetrical, cylindrical, perfect in its green cloud of foliage, yet there may be a worm at the root of it, and it may be given up to rottenness and destruction. Cultivated men may perish, and uncultured men may have the life. The maimed man may touch Christ with his stump, and so receive life, and the complete man may lay hold of the world and the flesh and the devil with his hands, and so share in their destruction.

Ay! and in that case the maimed man has the best of it. It is a very plain axiom of the rudest common-sense, this of my text: 'It is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than to go into hell-fire with both thy hands.' That is to say, it is better to live maimed than to die whole. A man comes into a hospital with gangrene in his leg; the doctor says it must come off; the man says, 'It shall not,' and he is dead to-morrow. Who is the fool—the man that says, 'Here, then, cut away; better life than limb,' or the man that says, 'I will keep it and I will die'?

'Better to enter into life maimed,' because you will not always be maimed. The life will overcome the maiming. There is a wonderful restoration of capacities and powers that have been sacrificed for Christ's sake, a restoration even here. As crustaceans will develop a new claw in place of one that they have thrown off in their peril to save their lives, so we, if we

have for Christ's sake maimed ourselves, will find that in a large measure the suppression will be recompensed even here on earth.

And hereafter, as the Rabbis used to say, 'No man will rise from the grave a cripple.' All the limitations which we have imposed upon ourselves, for Christ's sake, will be removed then. 'Then shall the eyes of the blind be opened, and the ears of the deaf be unstopped; then shall the lame man leap as a hart, and the tongue of the dumb shall sing.' 'Verily I say unto thee, there is no man that hath left any' of his possessions, affections, tastes, capacities, 'for My sake but he shall receive a hundredfold more in this life, and in the world to come, life everlasting.' No man is a loser by giving up anything for Jesus Christ.

And, on the other hand, the complete man, complete in everything except his spiritual nature, is a fragment in all his completeness; and yonder, there will for him be a solemn process of stripping. 'Take it from him, and give it to him that hath ten talents.' Ah! how much of that for which some of you are flinging away Jesus Christ will fade from you when you go yonder. 'His glory shall not descend after him'; 'as he came, so shall he go.' 'Tongues, they shall cease; knowledge, it shall vanish away'; gifts will fail, capacities will disappear when the opportunities for the exercise of them in a material world are at an end, and there will be little left to the man who *would* carry hands and feet and eyes all into the fire and forgot the 'one thing needful,' but a thin thread, if I may so say, of personality quivering with the sense of responsibility, and preyed upon by the gnawing worm of a too-late remorse.

My brother, the lips of Incarnate Love spoke those

solemn words of my text, which it becomes not me to repeat to you as if they were mine; but I ask you to weigh this, His urgent commandment, and to listen to His solemn assurance, by which He enforces the wisdom of the self-suppression: 'It is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands, to be cast into hell-fire.'

Give your hearts to Jesus Christ, and set the following in His footsteps and the keeping of His commandments high above all other aims. You will have to suppress much and give up much, but such suppression is the shortest road to becoming perfect men, complete in Him, and such surrender is the surest way to possess all things. 'He that loseth his life'—which is more than hand or eye—for Christ's sake, 'the same shall find it.'

THE LOST SHEEP AND THE SEEKING SHEPHERD

'If a man have an hundred sheep, and one of them be gone astray, doth he not leave the ninety and nine, and goeth into the mountains, and seeketh that which is gone astray?'—MATT. xviii. 12.

WE find this simple parable, or germ of a parable, in a somewhat more expanded form, as the first of the incomparable three in the fifteenth chapter of Luke's Gospel. Perhaps our Lord repeated the parable more than once. It is an unveiling of His inmost heart, and therein a revelation of the very heart of God. It touches the deepest things in His relation to men, and sets forth thoughts of Him, such as man never dared to dream. It does all this by the homeliest image and by an appeal to the simplest instincts. The most prosaic

shepherd looks for lost sheep, and everybody has peculiar joy over lost things found. They may not be nearly so valuable as things that were not lost. The unstrayed may be many, and the strayed be but one. Still there is a keener joy in the recovery of the one than in the unbroken possession of the ninety-and-nine. That feeling in a man may be only selfishness, but homely as it is—when the loser is God, and the lost are men, it becomes the means of uttering and illustrating that truth concerning God which no religion but that of the Cross has ever been bold enough to proclaim, that He cares most for the wanderers, and rejoices over the return of the one that went astray more than over the ninety-and-nine who never wandered.

There are some significant differences between this edition of the parable and the form which it assumes in the Gospel according to Luke. There it is spoken in vindication of Christ's consorting with publicans and sinners; here it is spoken in order to point the lesson of not despising the least and most insignificant of the sons of men. There the seeking Shepherd is obviously Christ; here the seeking Shepherd is rather the Divine Father; as appears by the words of the next verse: 'For it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish.' There the sheep is lost; here the sheep goes astray. There the Shepherd seeks till He find, here the Shepherd, perhaps, fails to find; for our Lord says, '*If so be that he find it.*'

But I am not about to venture on all the thoughts which this parable suggests, nor even to deal with the main lesson which it teaches. I wish merely to look at the two figures—the wanderer and the seeker.

I. First, then, let us look at that figure of the one wanderer.

Of course I need scarcely remind you that in the immediate application of the parable in Luke's Gospel, the ninety-and-nine were the respectable people who thought the publicans and harlots altogether too dirty to touch, and regarded it as very doubtful conduct on the part of this young Rabbi from Nazareth to be mixed up with persons whom no one with a proper regard for whited sepulchres would have anything to do with. To them He answers, in effect—I am a shepherd; that is my vindication. Of course a shepherd goes after and cares for the lost sheep. He does not ask about its worth, or anything else. He simply follows the lost because it is lost. It may be a poor little creature after all, but it is lost, and that is enough. And so He vindicates Himself to the ninety-and-nine: 'You do not need Me, you are found. I take you on your own estimation of yourselves, and tell you that My mission is to the wanderers.'

I do not suppose, however, that any of us have need to be reminded that upon a closer and deeper examination of the facts of the case, every hoof of the ninety-and-nine belonged to a stray sheep too; and that in the wider application of the parable *all* men are wanderers. Remembering, then, this universal application, I would point out two or three things about the condition of these strayed sheep, which include the whole race. The ninety-and-nine may shadow for us a number of beings, in unfallen worlds, immensely greater than even the multitudes of wandering souls that have lived here through weary ages of sin and tears, but that does not concern us now.

The first thought I gather from the parable is that

all men are Christ's sheep. That sounds a strange thing to say. What? all these men and women who, having run away from Him, are plunged in sin, like sheep mired in a black bog, the scoundrels and the profligates, the scum and the outcasts of great cities; people with narrow foreheads, and blighted, blasted lives, the despair of our modern civilisation—are they all His? And in those great wide-lying heathen lands where men know nothing of His name and of His love, are they all His too? Let Him answer, 'Other sheep I have'—though they look like goats to-day—'which are not of this fold, them also must I bring, and they shall hear My voice.' All men are Christ's, because He has been the Agent of divine creation, and the grand words of the hundredth Psalm are true about Him. 'It is He that hath made us, and we are His. We are His people and the sheep of His pasture.' They are His, because His sacrifice has bought them for His. Erring, straying, lost, they still belong to the Shepherd.

Notice next, the picture of the sheep as wandering. The word is, literally, 'which *goeth* astray,' not 'which is gone astray.' It pictures the process of wandering, not the result as accomplished. We see the sheep, poor, silly creature, not going anywhere in particular, only there is a sweet tuft of grass here, and it crops that; and here is a bit of ground where there is soft walking, and it goes there; and so, step by step, not meaning anything, not knowing where it is going, or that it *is* going anywhere; it goes, and goes, and goes, and at last it finds out that it is away from its beat on the hillside—for sheep keep to one bit of hillside generally, as any shepherd will tell you—and then it begins to bleat, and most helpless of creatures, flutter-

ing and excited, rushes about amongst the thorns and brambles, or gets mired in some quag or other, and it will never find its way back of itself until some one comes for it.

‘So,’ says Christ to us, ‘there are a great many of you who do not mean to go wrong; you are not going anywhere in particular, you do not start on your course with any intentions either way, of doing right or wrong, of keeping near God, or going away from Him, but you simply go where the grass is sweetest, or the walking easiest. But look at the end of it; where you have got to. You have got away from Him.’

Now, if you take that series of parables in Luke xv., and note the metaphors there, you will see three different sides given of the process by which men’s hearts stray away from God. There is the sheep that wanders. That is partly conscious, and voluntary, but in a large measure simply yielding to inclination and temptation. Then there is the coin that trundles away under some piece of furniture, and is lost—that is a picture of the manner in which a man, without volition, almost mechanically sometimes, slides into sins and disappears as it were, and gets covered over with the dust of evil. And then there is the worst of all, the lad that had full knowledge of what he was doing. ‘I am going into a far-off country; I cannot stand this any longer—all restraint and no liberty, and no power of doing what I like with my own; and always obliged to obey and be dependent on my father for my pocket-money! Give me what belongs to me, for good and all, and let me go!’ That is the picture of the worst kind of wandering, when a man knows what he is about, and looks at the merciful restraint of the law of God, and says: ‘No! I had rather be far away; and my own

master, and not always be “cribbed, cabined, and confined” with these limitations.’

The straying of the half-conscious sheep may seem more innocent, but it carries the poor creature away from the shepherd as completely as if it had been wholly intelligent and voluntary. Let us learn the lesson. In a world like this, if a man does not know very clearly where he is going, he is sure to go wrong. If you do not exercise a distinct determination to do God’s will, and to follow in His footsteps who has set us an example; and if your main purpose is to get succulent grass to eat and soft places to walk in, you are certain before long to wander tragically from all that is right and noble and pure. It is no excuse for you to say: ‘I never meant it’; ‘I did not intend any harm, I only followed my own inclinations.’ ‘More mischief is wrought’—to the man himself, as well as to other people—‘from want of thought than is wrought by’ an evil will. And the sheep has strayed as effectually, though, when it set out on its journey, it never thought of straying. Young men and women beginning life, remember! and take this lesson.

But then there is another point that I must touch for a moment. In the Revised Version you will find a very tiny alteration in the words of my text, which, yet, makes a large difference in the sense. The last clause of my text, as it stands in our Bible, is, ‘And seeketh that which is *gone* astray’; the Revised Version more correctly reads, ‘And seeketh that which *is going* astray.’ Now, look at the difference in these two renderings. In the former the process is represented as finished, in the correct rendering it is represented as going on. And that is what I would press on you, the awful, solemn, necessarily progressive character of

our wanderings from God. A man never gets to the end of the distance that separates between him and the Father, if his face is turned away from God. Every moment the separation is increasing. Two lines start from each other at the acutest angle and diverge more the further they are produced, until at last the one may be away up by the side of God's throne, and the other away down in the deepest depths of hell. So accordingly my text carries with solemn pathos, in a syllable, the tremendous lesson: 'The sheep is not gone, but *going* astray.' Ah! there are some of my hearers who are daily and hourly increasing the distance between themselves and their merciful Father.

Now the last thing here in this picture is the contrast between the description given of the wandering sheep in our text, and that in St. Luke. Here it is represented as wandering, there it is represented as lost. That is very beautiful and has a meaning often not noticed by hasty readers. Who is it that has lost it? We talk about the lost soul and the lost man, as if it were the man that had lost *himself*, and that is true, and a dreadful truth it is. But that is not the truth that is taught in this parable, and meant by us to be gathered from it. Who is it that has lost it? He to whom it belonged.

That is to say, wherever a heart gets ensnared and entangled with the love of the treasures and pleasures of this life, and so departs in allegiance and confidence and friendship from the living God, there God the Father regards Himself as the poorer by the loss of one of His children, by the loss of one of His sheep. He does not care to possess you by the hold of mere creation and supremacy and rule. He desires you to love Him, and then He deems that He has you. And if

you do not love Him, He deems that He has lost you. There is something in the divine heart that goes out after His lost property. We touch here upon deep things that we cannot speak of intelligently; only remember this, that what looks like self-regard in man is the purest love in God, and that there is nothing in the whole revelation which Christianity makes of the character of God more wonderful than this, that He judges that He has lost His child when His child has forgotten to love Him.

II. So much, then, for one of the great pictures in this text. I can spare but a sentence or two for the other—the picture of the Seeker.

I said that in the one form of the parable it was more distinctly the Father, and in the other more distinctly the Son, who is represented as seeking the sheep. But these two do still coincide in substance, inasmuch as God's chief way of seeking us poor wandering sheep is through the work of His dear Son Jesus, and the coming of Christ is the Father's searching for His sheep in the 'cloudy and dark day.'

According to my text God leaves the ninety-and-nine and goes into the mountains where the wanderer is, and seeks him. And this, couched in veiled form, is the great mystery of the divine love, the incarnation and sacrifice of Jesus Christ our Lord. Here is the answer by anticipation to the sarcasm that is often levelled at evangelical Christianity: 'You must think a good deal of human nature, and must have a very arrogant notion of the inhabitant of this little speck that floats in the great sea of the heavens, if you suppose that with all these millions of orbs he is so important that the divine Nature came down upon this little tiny molehill, and took his nature and died.'

‘Yes!’ says Christ, ‘not because man was so great, not because man was so valuable in comparison with the rest of creation—he was but one amongst ninety-nine unfallen and un sinful—but because he was so wretched, because he was so small, because he had gone so far away from God; *therefore*, the seeking love came after him, and would draw him to itself.’ That, I think, is answer enough to the cavil.

And then, there is a difference between these two versions of the Parable in respect to their representation of the end of the seeking. The one says ‘seeks until He finds.’ Oh! the patient, incredible inexhaustibleness of the divine love. God’s long-suffering, if I may take such a metaphor, like a sleuth-hound, will follow the object of its search through all its windings and doublings, until it comes up to it. So that great seeking Shepherd follows us through all the devious courses of our wayward, wandering footsteps doubling back upon themselves, until He finds us. Though the sheep may increase its distance, the Shepherd follows. The further away we get the more tender His appeal; the more we stop our ears the louder the voice with which He calls. You cannot wear out Jesus Christ, you cannot exhaust the resources of His bounteousness, of His tenderness. However we may have been going wrong, however far we may have been wandering, however vehemently we may be increasing, at every moment, our distance from Him, He is coming after us, serene, loving, long-suffering, and will not be put away.

Dear friend! would you only believe that a loving, living Person is really seeking you, seeking you by my poor words now, seeking you by many a providence, seeking you by His Gospel, by His Spirit; and will

never be satisfied till He has found you in your finding Him and turning your soul to Him !

But, I beseech you, do not forget the solemn lesson drawn from the other form of the parable which is given in my text: *If so be that He find it.* There is a possibility of failure. What an awful power you have of burying yourself in the sepulchre, as it were, of your own self-will, and hiding yourself in the darkness of your own unbelief! You can frustrate the seeking love of God. Some of you have done so—some of you have done so all your lives. Some of you, perhaps at this moment, are trying to do so, and consciously endeavouring to steel your hearts against some softening that may have been creeping over them whilst I have been speaking. Are you yielding to His seeking love, or wandering further and further from Him? He has come to find you. Let Him not seek in vain, but let the Good Shepherd draw you to Himself, where, lifted on the Cross, He ‘giveth His life for the sheep.’ He will restore your soul and carry you back on His strong shoulder, or in His bosom near His loving heart, to the green pastures and the safe fold. There will be joy in His heart, more than over those who have never wandered; and there will be joy in the heart of the returning wanderer, such as they who had not strayed and learned the misery could never know, for, as the profound Jewish saying has it, ‘In the place where the penitents stand, the perfectly righteous cannot stand.’

THE PERSISTENCE OF THWARTED LOVE

'If so be that he find it.'—MATT. xviii. 13.

'Until he find it.'—LUKE xv. 4.

LIKE other teachers, Jesus seems to have had favourite points of view and utterances which came naturally to His lips. There are several instances in the gospels of His repeating the same sayings in entirely different connections and with different applications. One of these habitual points of view seems to have been the thought of men as wandering sheep, and of Himself as the Shepherd. The metaphor has become so familiar that we need a moment's reflection to grasp the mingled tenderness, sadness, and majesty of it. He thought habitually of all humanity as a flock of lost sheep, and of Himself as high above them, unparticipant of their evil, and having one errand—to bring them back.

And not only does He frequently refer to this symbol, but we have the two editions, from which my texts are respectively taken, of the Parable of the Lost Sheep. I say two editions, because it seems to me a great deal more probable that Jesus should have repeated Himself than that either of the Evangelists should have ventured to take this gem and set it in an alien setting. The two versions differ slightly in some unimportant expressions, and Matthew's is the more condensed of the two. But the most important variation is the one which is brought to light by the two fragments which I have ventured to isolate as texts. '*If* He find' implies the possible failure of the Shepherd's search; '*till* He find' implies His unwearied persistence in the teeth of all failure. And, taken in

conjunction, they suggest some very blessed and solemn considerations, which I pray for strength to lay upon your minds and hearts now.

I. But first let me say a word or two upon the more general thought brought out in both these clauses—of the Shepherd's search.

Now, beautiful and heart-touching as that picture is, of the Shepherd away amongst the barren mountains searching minutely in every ravine and thicket, it wants a little explanation in order to be brought into correspondence with the fact which it expresses. For His search for His lost property is not in ignorance of where it is, and His finding of it is not His discovery of His sheep, but its discovery of its Shepherd. We have to remember wherein consists the loss before we can understand wherein consists the search.

Now, if we ask ourselves that question first, we get a flood of light on the whole matter. The great hundredth Psalm, according to its true rendering, says, 'It is He that hath made us, *and we are His*; . . . we are . . . the sheep of His pasture.' But God's true possession of man is not simply the possession inherent in the act of creation. For there is only one way in which spirit can own spirit, or heart can possess heart, and that is through the voluntary yielding and love of the one to the other. So Jesus Christ, who, in all His seeking after us men, is the voice and hand of Almighty Love, does not count that He has found a man until the man has learned to love Him. For He loses us when we are alienated from Him, when we cease to trust Him, when we refuse to obey Him, when we will not yield to Him, but put Him far away from us. Therefore the search which, as being Christ's is God's in Christ, is for our love, our trust, our obedience;

and in reality it consists of all the energies by which Jesus Christ, as God's embodiment and representative, seeks to woo and win you and me back to Himself, that He may truly possess us.

If the Shepherd's seeking is but a tender metaphor for the whole aggregate of the ways by which the love that is divine and human in Jesus Christ moves round about our closed hearts, as water may feel round some hermetically sealed vessel, seeking for an entrance, then surely the first and chiefest of them, which makes its appeal to each of us as directly as to any man that ever lived, is that great mystery that Jesus Christ, the eternal Word of God, left the ninety-and-nine that were safe on the high pastures of the mountains of God, and came down among us, out into the wilderness, 'to seek and to save that which was lost.'

And, brother, that method of winning—I was going to say, of *earning*—our love comes straight in its appeal to every single soul on the face of the earth. Do not say that thou wert not in Christ's heart and mind when He willed to be born and willed to die. Thou, and thou, and thou, and every single unit of humanity were there clear before Him in their individuality; and He died for thee, and for me, and for *every* man. And, in one aspect, that is more than to say that He died for *all* men. There was a specific intention in regard to each of us in the mission of Jesus Christ; and when He went to the Cross the Shepherd was not giving His life for a confused flock of which He knew not the units, but for sheep the face of each of whom He knows, and each of whom He loves. There was His first seeking; there is His chief seeking. There is the seeking which ought to appeal to every soul of man, and which, ever since you were children, has been

making its appeal to you. Has it done so in vain? Dear friend, let not your heart still be hard.

He seeks us by every record of that mighty love that died for us, even when it is being spoken as poorly, and with as many limitations and imperfections, as I am speaking it now. 'As though God did beseech you by us, pray you in Christ's stead.' It is not arrogance, God forbid! it is simple truth when I say, Never mind about me; but my word, in so far as it is true and tender, is Christ's word to you. And here, in our midst, that unseen Form is passing along these pews and speaking to these hearts, and the Shepherd is seeking His sheep.

He seeks each of us by the inner voices and emotions in our hearts and minds, by those strange whisperings which sometimes we hear, by the suddenly upstarting convictions of duty and truth which sometimes, without manifest occasion, flash across our hearts. These voices are Christ's voice, for, in a far deeper sense than most men superficially believe, 'He is the true Light that lighteth every man coming into the world.'

He is seeking us by our unrest, by our yearnings after we know not what, by our dim dissatisfaction which insists upon making itself felt in the midst of joys and delights, and which the world fails to satisfy as much as it fails to interpret. There is a cry in every heart, little as the bearer of the heart translates it into its true meaning—a cry after God, even the living God. And by all your unrests, your disappointments, your hopes unfulfilled, your hopes fulfilled and blasted in the fulfilment, your desires that perish unfructed; by all the mystic movements of the spirit that yearns for something beyond the material and the visible, Jesus Christ is seeking His sheep.

He seeks us by the discipline of life, for I believe that Christ is the active Providence of God, and that the hands that were pierced on the Cross do move the wheels of the history of the world, and mould the destinies of individual spirits.

The deepest meaning of all life is that we should be won to seek Him who in it all is seeking us, and led to venture our hopes, and fling the anchor of our faith beyond the bounds of the visible, that it may fasten in the Eternal, even in Christ Himself, 'the same yesterday and to-day and for ever' when earth and its training are done with. Brethren, it is a blessed thing to live, when we interpret life's smallnesses aright as the voice of the Master, who, by them all—our sadness and our gladness, the unrest of our hearts and the yearnings and longings of our spirits, by the ministry of His word, by the record of His sufferings—is echoing the invitation of the Cross itself, 'Come unto Me, all ye . . . and I will give you rest!' So much for the Shepherd's search.

II. And now, in the second place, a word as to the possible thwarting of the search.

'If so be that He find.' That is an awful *if*, when we think of what lies below it. The thing seems an absurdity when it is spoken, and yet it is a grim fact in many a life—viz. that Christ's effort can fail and be thwarted. Not that His search is perfunctory or careless, but that we shroud ourselves in darkness through which that love can find no way. It is we, not He, that are at fault when He fails to find that which He seeks. There is nothing more certain than that God, and Christ the image of God, desire the rescue of every man, woman, and child of the human race. Let no teaching blur that sunlight fact. There is nothing

more certain than that Jesus Christ has done, and is doing, all that He can do to secure that purpose. If He could make every man love Him, and so find every man, be sure that He would do it. But He cannot. For here is the central mystery of creation, which if we could solve there would be few knots that would resist our fingers, that a finite will like yours or mine can lift itself up against God, and that, having the capacity, it has the desire. He says, 'Come!' We say, 'I will not.' That door of the heart opens from within, and He never breaks it open. He stands at the door and knocks. And then the same solemn *if* comes—'If any man opens, I will come in'; if any man keeps it shut, and holds on to prevent its being opened, I will stop out.

Brethren, I seek to press upon you now the one plain truth, that if you are not saved men and women, there is no person in heaven or earth or hell that has any blame in the matter but yourself alone. God appeals to us, and says, 'What more *could* have been done to My vineyard that I have not done unto it?' His hands are clean, and the infinite love of Christ is free from all blame, and all the blame lies at our own doors.

I must not dwell upon the various reasons which lead so many men among us—as, alas! the utmost charity cannot but see that there are—to turn away from Christ's appeals, and to be unwilling to 'have this Man' either 'to reign over' them or to save them. There are many such, I am sure, in my audience now; and I would fain, if I could, draw them to that Lord in whom alone they have life, and rest, and holiness, and heaven.

One great reason is because you do not believe that you need Him. There is an awful inadequacy in most

men's conceptions—and still more in their feelings—as to their sin. Oh dear friends, if you would only submit your consciences for one meditative half-hour to the light of God's highest law, I think you would find out something more than many of you know, as to what you are and what your sin is. Many of us do not much believe that we are in any danger. I have seen a sheep comfortably cropping the short grass on a down over the sea, with one foot out in the air, and a precipice of five hundred feet below it, and at the bottom the crawling water. It did not know that there was any danger of going over. That is like some of us. If you believed what is true—that 'sin when it is finished, bringeth forth death,' and understood what 'death' meant, you would feel the mercy of the Shepherd seeking you. Some of us think we are in the flock when we are not. Some of us do not like submission. Some of us have no inclination for the sweet pastures that He provides, and would rather stay where we are, and have the fare that is going there.

We do not need to *do* anything to put Him away. I have no doubt that some of us, as soon as my voice ceases, will plunge again into worldly talk and thoughts before they are down the chapel steps, and so blot out, as well as they can, any vagrant and superficial impression that may have been made. Dear brethren, it is a very easy matter to turn away from the Shepherd's voice. 'I called, and ye refused. I stretched out My hands, and *no man regarded.*' That is all! That is what you do, and that is enough.

III. So, lastly, the thwarted search prolonged.

'Till He find'—that is a wonderful and a merciful word. It indicates the infinitude of Christ's patient forgiveness and perseverance. *We tire of searching.*

'Can a mother forget' or abandon her seeking after a lost child? Yes! if it has gone on for so long as to show that further search is hopeless, she will go home and nurse her sorrow in her heart. Or, perhaps, like some poor mothers and wives, it will turn her brain, and one sign of her madness will be that, long years after grief should have been calm because hope was dead, she will still be looking for the little one so long lost. But Jesus Christ stands at the closed door, as a great modern picture shows, though it has been so long undisturbedly closed that the hinges are brown with rust, and weeds grow high against it. He stands there in the night, with the dew on His hair, unheeded or repelled, like some stranger in a hostile village seeking for a night's shelter. He will not be put away; but, after all refusals, still with gracious finger, knocks upon the door, and speaks into the heart. Some of you have refused Him all your lives, and perhaps you have grey hairs upon you now. And He is speaking to you still. He 'suffereth long, is not easily provoked, is not soon angry; hopeth all things,' even of the obstinate rejecters.

For that is another truth that this word 'till' preaches to us—viz. the possibility of bringing back those that have gone furthest away and have been longest away. The world has a great deal to say about incurable cases of moral obliquity and deformity. Christ knows nothing about 'incurable cases.' If there is a worst man in the world—and perhaps there is—there is nothing but his own disinclination to prevent his being brought back, and made as pure as an angel.

But do not let us deal with generalities; let us bring the truths to ourselves. Dear brethren, I know nothing

about the most of you. I should not know you again if I met you five minutes after we part now. I have never spoken to many of you, and probably never shall, except in this public way; but I know that *you* need Christ, and that Christ wants *you*. And I know that, however far you have gone, you have not gone so far but that His love feels out through the remoteness to grasp you, and would fain draw you to itself.

I dare say you have seen upon some dreary moor, or at the foot of some 'scaur' on the hillside, the bleached bones of a sheep, lying white and grim among the purple heather. It strayed, unthinking of danger, tempted by the sweet herbage; it fell; it vainly bleated; it died. But what if it had heard the shepherd's call, and had preferred to lie where it fell, and to die where it lay? We talk about 'silly sheep.' Are there any of them so foolish as men and women listening to me now, who will not answer the Shepherd's voice when they hear it, with, 'Lord, here am I, come and help me out of this miry clay, and bring me back.' He is saying to each of you, 'Turn ye, turn ye, why will ye die?' May He not have to say at last of any of us, 'Ye would not come to Me, that ye might have life!'

FORGIVEN AND UNFORGIVING

'Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times; but, Until seventy times seven.'—MATT. xviii. 22.

THE disciples had been squabbling about pre-eminence in the kingdom which they thought was presently to appear. They had ventured to refer their selfish and ambitious dispute to Christ's arbitrament. He answered by telling them the qualifications of 'the

greatest in the kingdom'—that they are to be humble like little children; that they are to be placable; that they are to use all means to reclaim offenders; and that, even if the offence is against themselves, they are to ignore the personal element, and to regard the offender, not so much as having done them harm, as having harmed himself by his evil-doing.

Peter evidently feels that that is a very hard commandment for a man of his temperament, and so he goes to Jesus Christ for a little further direction, and proposes a question as to the limits of this disposition: 'How often shall my brother sin?' The very question betrays that he does not understand what forgiveness means; for it is not real, if the 'forgiven' sin is stowed away safely in the memory. 'I can forgive, but I cannot forget,' generally means, 'I do not *quite* forgive.' We are not to take the pardoned offence, and carry it to a kind of 'suspense account,' to be revived if another is committed, but we are to blot it out altogether. Peter thought that he had given a very wide allowance when he said 'seven times.' Christ's answer lifts the whole subject out of the realm of hard and fast lines and limits, for He takes the two perfect numbers 'ten' and 'seven,' and multiplies them together, and then He multiplies that by 'seven' once more; and the product is *not* four hundred and ninety, but is innumerableness. He does not mean that the four hundred and ninety-first offence is outside the pale, but He suggests indefiniteness, endlessness. So, as I say, He lifts the question out of the region in which Peter was keeping it, thereby betraying that he did not understand what he was talking about, and tells us that there are no limits to the obligation.

The parable which follows, and follows with a 'there-

fore,' does not deal so much with Peter's question as to the limits of the disposition, but sets forth its grounds and the nature of its manifestations. If we understand why we ought to forgive, and what forgiveness is, we shall not say, 'How often?' The question will have answered itself.

I turn to the parable rather than the words which I have read as our starting-point, to seek to bring out the lessons which it contains in regard to our relations to God, and to one another. There are three sections in it: the king and his debtor; the forgiven debtor and *his* debtor; and the forgiven debtor unforgiven because unforgiving. And if we look at these three points I think we shall get the lessons intended.

I. The king and his debtor.

A certain king has servants, whom he gathers together to give in their reckoning. And one of them is brought that owes him ten thousand talents. Now, it is to be noticed at the very outset that the analogy between debt and sin, though real, is extremely imperfect. No metaphor of that sort goes on all fours, and there has been a great deal of harm done to theology and to evangelical religion by carrying out too completely the analogy between money debts and our sins against God. But although the analogy is imperfect, it is very real. The first point that is to be brought out in this first part of the parable is the immense magnitude of every man's transgressions against God. Numismatists and arithmeticians may jangle about the precise amount represented by the thousand talents. It differs according to the talent which is taken as the basis of the calculation. There were several talents in use in the currency of ancient days. But the very point of the expression is not the

specification of an exact amount, but the use of a round number which is to suggest an undefined magnitude. 'Ten thousand talents,' according to one estimate, is some two millions and a quarter of pounds sterling.

But I would point out that the amount is stated in terms of talents, and *any* talent is a large sum; and there are ten thousand of these; and the reason why the account is made out in terms of talents, the largest denomination in the currency of the period, is because every sin against God is a great sin. He being what He is, and we being what we are, and sin being what it is, every sin is large, although the deed which embodies it may be, when measured by the world's foot-rule, very small. For the essence of sin is rebellion against God and the enthroning of self as His victorious rival; and all rebellion is rebellion, whether it is found in arms in the field, or whether it is simply sulkily refusing obedience and cherishing thoughts of treason. We are always apt to go wrong in our estimate of the great and small in human actions, and, although the terms of magnitude do not apply properly to moral questions at all, there is no more conspicuous misuse of language than when we speak of anything which has in it the virus of rebellion against God, and the breach of His law, as being a small sin. It may be a small act; it is a great sin. Little rattlesnakes are snakes; they have rattles and poison fangs as really as the most monstrous of the brood that coils and hisses in some cave. So the account is made out in terms of talents, because every sin is a great one. I need not dwell upon the numerousness that is suggested. 'Ten thousand' is the natural current expression for a number that is not innumerable, but is only known to be very great. The psalmist says:

‘They are more than the hairs of my head.’ How many hairs had you in your head, David? Do you know? ‘No!’ And how many sins have you committed? Do you know? ‘No!’ The number is beyond count by us, though it may be counted by Him against whom they are done. Do you believe that about yourself, my friend, that the debit side of your account has filled all the page and has to be carried forward on to another? Do we any of us realise, as we all of us ought to do, the infinite number, and the transcendent greatness, of our transgressions against the Father?

But the next point to be noticed is the stern legal right of the creditor. It sounds harsh, cruel, almost brutal, that the man and his wife and his children should be sold into slavery, and all that he had should be taken from him, in order to go some little way towards the reduction of the enormous debt that he owed. Christ puts in that harsh and apparently cruel conduct in the story, not to suggest that it was harsh and cruel, but because it was according to the law of the time. A recognised legal right was exercised by the creditor when he said, ‘Take him; sell him for a slave, and bring me what he fetches in the open markets.’ So that we have here suggested the solemn thought of the right that divine justice, acting according to strict retributive law, has over each of us. Our own consciences attest it as perfectly within the scope of the divine retributive justice that our enormous sin should bring down a tremendous punishment.

I said that the analogy between sin and debt was a very imperfect one. It is imperfect in regard to one point—viz. the implication of other people in the consequences of the man’s evil; for although it is quite true that ‘the evil that men do lives after them,’

and spreads far beyond their sight, and involves many people, no other is amenable to divine justice for the sinner's debt. It is quite true that, when we do an evil action, we never can tell how far its wind-borne seeds may be carried, or where they may alight, or what sort of unwholesome fruit they may bear, or who may be poisoned by them; but, on the other hand, we, and we only, are responsible for our individual transgressions against God. 'If thou be wise, thou shalt be wise for thyself; and if thou scornest, thou alone shalt bear it.'

The same imperfection in the analogy applies to the next point in the parable—viz. the bankrupt debtor's prayer, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all.' Easy to promise! I wonder how long it would have taken a penniless bankrupt to scrape together two and a quarter millions of pounds? He said a great deal more than he could make good. But the language of his prayer is by no means the language that becomes a penitent at God's throne. We have not to offer to make future satisfaction. No! that is impossible. 'What I have written I have written,' and the page, with all its smudges and blots and misshapen letters, cannot be made other than it is by any future pages fairly written. No future righteousness has any power to affect the guilt of past sin. There is one thing that does *discharge* the writing from the page. Do you remember Paul's words, 'blotting out the handwriting that was against us—nailing it to His Cross'? You sometimes dip your pens into red ink, and run a couple of lines across the page of an account that is done with. Jesus Christ does the same across our account, and the debt is non-existent, because He has died.

But the prayer is the expression, if not of penitence yet of petition, and all the stern rigour of the law's

requirement at once melts away, and the king who, in the former words, seemed so harsh, now is almost incredibly merciful. For he not only cancels the debt, but sets the man free. 'Thy ways are not as our ways; . . . as the heavens are higher than the earth, so great is His mercy toward' the sinful soul.

II. So much, then, for the first part of this parable. Now a word as to the second, the forgiven debtor and his debt.

Our Lord uses in the 27th and 28th verses of our text the same expression very significantly and emphatically. 'The lord of *that servant* was moved with compassion.' And then again, in the 28th verse, 'But that *servant* went out and found one of his fellow-servants.' The repetition of the same phrase hooks the two halves together, emphasises the identity of the man, and the difference of his demeanour, on the two occasions.

The conduct described is almost impossibly disgusting and truculent. 'He found his fellow-servant, who owed him a hundred pence'—some three pounds, ten shillings—and with the hands that a minute before had been wrung in agony, and extended in entreaty, he throttled him; and with the voice that had been plaintively pleading for mercy a minute before, he gruffly growled, 'Pay me that thou owest.' He had just come through an agony of experience that might have made him tender. He had just received a blessing that might have made his heart glow. But even the repetition of his own petition does not touch him, and when the poor fellow-servant, with his paltry debt, says, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all,' it avails nothing. He durst not sell his fellow-servant. God's rights over a man are more than any man's over another. But he does what he can. He will not

do much towards recouping himself of his loan by flinging the poor debtor into prison, but if he cannot get his ducats he will gloat over his 'pound of flesh.' So he hurries him off to gaol.

Could a man have done like that? Ah! brethren, the things that would be monstrous in our relations to one another are common in our relations to God. Every day we see, and, alas! do, the very same thing, in our measure and degree. Do you never treasure up somebody's slights? Do you never put away in a pigeon-hole for safe-keeping, endorsed with the doer's name on the back of it, the record of some trivial offence against you? It is but as a penny against a talent, for the worst that any of us can do to another is nothing as compared with what many of us have been doing all our lives toward God. I dare say that some of us will go out from this place, and the next man that we meet that 'rubs us the wrong way,' or does us any harm, we shall score down his act against him with as implacable and unmerciful an unforgiveness as that of this servant in the parable. Do not believe that he was a monster of iniquity. He was just like us. We all of us have one human heart, and this man's crime is but too natural to us all. The essence of it was that having been forgiven, he did not forgive.

So, then, our Lord here implies the principle that God's mercy to us is to set the example to which our dealings with others is to be conformed. 'Even as I had mercy on thee' plainly proposes that miracle of divine forgiveness as our pattern as well as our hope. The world's morality recognises the duty of forgiveness. Christ shows us God's forgiveness as at once the model which is the perfect realisation of the idea in its completeness and inexhaustibleness, and also the motive

which, brought into our experience, inclines and enables us to forgive.

III. And now I come to the last point of the text—the debtor who had been forgiven falling back into the ranks of the unforgiven, because he does not forgive.

The fellow-servants were very much disgusted, no doubt. Our consciences work a great deal more rapidly, and rigidly, about other people's faults than they do about our own. And nine out of ten of these fellow-servants that were very sorry, and ran and told the king, would have done exactly the same thing themselves. The king, for the first time, is wroth. We do not read that he was so before, when the debt only was in question; but such unforgiving harshness, after the experience of such merciful forgiveness, rouses his righteous indignation. The unmercifulness of Christian people is a worse sin than many a deed that goes by very ugly names amongst men. And so the judgment that falls upon this evil-doer, who, by his truculence to his fellow-servant, had betrayed the baseness of his nature and the ingratitude of his heart, is, 'Put him back where he was! Tie the two and a quarter millions round his neck again! Let us see what he will do by way of discharging it now!'

Now, do not let any theological systems prevent you from recognising the solemn truth that underlies that representation, that there may be things in the hearts and conduct of forgiven Christians which may cancel the cancelling of their debt, and bring it all back again. No man can cherish the malicious disposition that treasures up offences against himself, and at the same moment feel that the divine love is wrapping him round in its warm folds. If we are to retain our consciousness of having been forgiven by God, and received

into the amplitude of His heart, we must, in our measure and degree, imitate that on which we trust, and be mirrors of the divine mercy which we say has saved us.

Our parable lays equal stress on two things. First, that the foundation of all real mercifulness in men is the reception of forgiving mercy from God. We must have experienced it before we can exercise it. And, second, we must exercise it, if we desire to continue to experience it. 'Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.' That applies to Christian people. But behind that there lies the other truth, that in order to be merciful we must first of all have received the initial mercy of cancelled transgression.

So, dear friends, here are the two lessons for every one of us. First, to recognise our debt, and go to Him in whom God is well pleased, for its abolishment and forgiveness; and then to go out into the world, and live like Him, and show to others love kindled by and kindred to that to which we trust for our own salvation. 'Be ye therefore imitators of God, as beloved children, and walk in love, as God also hath loved us.'

THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE KING

'And, behold, one came and said unto Him, Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life? 17. And He said unto him, Why callest thou Me good? there is none good but One, that is, God: but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments. 18. He saith unto Him, Which? Jesus said, Thou shalt do no murder, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, 19. Honour thy father and thy mother: and, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. 20. The young man saith unto Him, All these things have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet? 21. Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow Me. 22. But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions. 23. Then said Jesus unto His disciples, Verily I say unto you, That a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven. 24. And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel

to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. 25. When His disciples heard it, they were exceedingly amazed, saying, Who then can be saved? 26. But Jesus beheld them, and said unto them, With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible.'—MATT. xix. 16-26.

WE have here one of the saddest stories in the gospels. It is a true soul's tragedy. The young man is in earnest, but his earnestness has not volume and force enough to float him over the bar. He wishes to have some great thing bidden him to do, but he recoils from the sharp test which Christ imposes. He truly wants the prize, but the cost is too great; and yet he wishes it so much that he goes away without it in deep sorrow, which perhaps, at another day, ripened into the resolve which then was too high for him. There is a certain severity in our Lord's tone, an absence of recognition of the much good in the young man, and a naked stringency in His demand from him, which sound almost harsh, but which are set in their true light by Mark's note, that Jesus 'loved him,' and therefore treated him thus. The truest way to draw ingenuous souls is not to flatter, nor to make entrance easy by dropping the standard or hiding the requirements, but to call out all their energy by setting before them the lofty ideal. Easy-going disciples are easily made—and lost. Thorough-going ones are most surely won by calling for entire surrender.

I. We may gather together the earlier part of the conversation, as introductory to the Lord's requirement (vs. 16-20), in which we have the picture of a real though imperfect moral earnestness, and may note how Christ deals with it. Matthew tells us that the questioner was young and rich. Luke adds that he was a 'ruler'—a synagogue official, that is—which was unusual for a young man, and indicates that his legal blamelessness was recognised. Mark adds one of his

touches, which are not only picturesque, but character-revealing, by the information that he came 'running' to Jesus in the way, so eager was he, and fell at His feet, so reverential was he. His first question is singularly compacted of good and error. The fact that he came to Christ for a purely religious purpose, not seeking personal advantage for himself or for others, like the crowds who followed for loaves and cures, nor laying traps for Him with puzzles which might entangle Him with the authorities, nor asking theological questions for curiosity, but honestly and earnestly desiring to be helped to lay hold of eternal life, is to be put down to his credit. He is right in counting it the highest blessing.

Where had he got hold of the thought of 'eternal life'? It was miles above the dusty speculations and casuistries of the rabbis. Probably from Christ Himself. He was right in recognising that the conditions of possessing it were moral, but his conception of 'good' was superficial, and he thought more of doing good than of being good, and of the desired life as payment for meritorious actions. In a word, he stood at the point of view of the old dispensation. 'This do, and thou shalt live,' was his belief; and what he wished was further instruction as to what 'this' was. He was to be praised in that he docilely brought his question to Jesus, even though, as Christ's answer shows, there was error mingling in his docility. Such is the character—a young man, rich, influential, touched with real longings for the highest life, ready, so far as he knows himself, to do whatever he is bidden, in order to secure it.

We might have expected Christ, who opened His arms wide for publicans and harlots, to have welcomed this fair, ingenuous seeker with some kindly word. But He

has none for him. We adopt the reading of the Revised Version, in which our Lord's first word is repellent. It is in effect—'There is no need for your question, which answers itself. There is one good Being, the source and type of every good thing, and therefore the good, which you ask about, can only be conformity to His will. You need not come to Me to know what you are to do.' He relegates the questioner, not to his own conscience, but to the authoritative revealed will of God in the law. Modern views of Christ's work, which put all its stress on the perfection of His moral character, and His office as a pattern of righteousness, may well be rebuked by the fact that He expressly disclaimed this character, and declared that, if He was only to be regarded as republishing the law of human conduct, His work was needless. Men have enough knowledge of what they must do to enter into life, without Jesus Christ. No doubt, Christ's moral teaching transcends that given of old; but His special work was not to tell men what to do, but to make it possible for them to do it; to give, not the law, but the power, both the motive and the impulse, which will fulfil the law. On another occasion He answered a similar question in a different manner. When the Jews asked Him, 'What must we do, that we may work the works of God?' He replied by the plain evangelical statement: 'This is the work of God, that ye believe on Him whom He hath sent.' Why did He not answer the young ruler thus? Only because He knew that he needed to be led to that thought by having his own self-complacency shattered, and the clinging of his soul to earth laid bare. The whole treatment of him here is meant to bring him to the apprehension of faith as preceding all truly good work.

The young man's second question says a great deal in its one word. It indicates astonishment at being remanded to these old, well-worn precepts, and might be rendered, 'What sort of commandments?' as if taking it for granted that they must be new and peculiar. It is the same spirit as that which in all ages has led men who with partial insight longed after eternal life, to seek it by fantastic and unusual roads of extraordinary sacrifices or services—the spirit which filled monasteries, and invented hair shirts, and fastings, and swinging with hooks in your back at Hindoo festivals. The craving for more than ordinary 'good works' shows a profound mistake in the estimate of the ordinary, and a fatal blunder as to the relation between 'goodness' and 'eternal life.'

So Christ answers the question by quoting the second half of the Decalogue, which deals with the homeliest duties, and appending to it the summary of the law, which requires love to our neighbour as to ourselves. Why does He omit the earlier half? Probably because He would meet the error of the question, by presenting only the plainest, most familiar commandments, and because He desired to excite the consciousness of deficiency, which could be most easily done in connection with these.

There is a touch of impatience in the rejoinder, 'All these have I kept,' and more than a touch of self-satisfaction. The law has failed to accomplish one of its chief purposes in the young man, in that it has not taught him his sinfulness. No doubt he had a right to say that his outward life had been free from breaches of such very elementary morality which any old woman could have taught him. He had never gone below the surface of the commandments, nor below

the surface of his acts, or he would not have answered so jauntily. He had yet to learn that the height of 'goodness' is reached, not by adding some strange new performances to the threadbare precepts of everyday duty, but by digging deep into these, and bottoming the fabric of our lives on their inmost spirit. He had yet to learn that whoever says, 'All these have I kept,' thereby convicts himself of understanding neither them nor himself.

Still he was not at rest, although he had, as he fancied, kept them all. His last question is a plaintive, honest acknowledgment of the hungry void within, which no round of outward obediences can ever fill. He knows that he has not the inner fountain springing up into eternal life. He is dimly aware of something wanting, whether in his obedience or no, at all events in his peace; and he is right in believing that the reason for that conscious void is something wanting in his conduct. But he will not learn what Christ has been trying to teach him, that he needs no new commandment, but a deeper understanding and keeping of the old. Hence his question, half a wail of a hungry heart, half petulant impatience with Christ's reiteration of obvious duties. There are multitudes of this kind in all ages, honestly wishing to lay hold of eternal life, able to point to virtuous conduct, anxious to know and do anything lacking, and yet painfully certain that something is wanting somewhere.

II. Now comes the sharp-pointed test, which pricks the brilliant bubble. Mark tells us that Jesus accompanied His word with one of those looks which searched a soul, and bore His love into it. 'If thou wouldest be perfect,' takes up the confession of something 'lacking,' and shows what that is. It is unnecessary to

remark that this commandment to sell all and give to the poor is intended only for the individual case. No other would-be disciple was called upon to do so. It cannot be meant for others; for, if all were sellers, where would the buyers be? Nor need we do more than point out that the command of renunciation is only half of Christ's answer, the other being, 'Come, follow Me.' But we are not to slide easily over the precept with the comfortable thought that it was special treatment for a special case. The principle involved in it is medicine for all, and the only way of healing for any. This man was tied to earth by the cords of his wealth. They did not hinder him from keeping the commandments, for he had no temptations to murder, or adultery, or theft, or neglect of parents. But they did hinder him from giving his whole self up, and from regarding eternal life as the most precious of all things. Therefore for him there was no safety short of entire outward denuding himself of them; and, if he was in earnest out and out in his questions, here was a new thing for *him* to do. Others are hindered by other things, and they are called to abandon these. The one thing needful for entrance into life is at bottom self-surrender, and the casting away of all else for its sovereign sake. 'I do count them but dung' must be the language of every one who will win Christ. The hands must be emptied of treasures, and the heart swept clear of lesser loves, if He is to be grasped by our hands, and to dwell in our hearts. More of us than we are willing to believe are kept from entire surrender to Jesus Christ, by money and worldly possessions; and many professing Christians are kept shrivelled and weak and joyless because they love their wealth more than their Lord, and would think it madness to

do as this man was bidden to do. When ballast is thrown out, the balloon shoots up. A general unloading of the 'thick clay' which weighs down the Christian life of England, would let thousands soar to heights which they will never reach as long as they love money and what it buys as much as they do. The letter of this commandment may be only applicable in a special case (though, perhaps, this one young man was not the only human being that ever needed this treatment), but the spirit is of universal application. No man enters into life who does not count all things but loss, and does not die to them all, that he may follow Christ.

III. Then comes the collapse of all the enthusiasm. The questioner's earnestness chills at the touch of the test. What has become of the eagerness which brought him running to Jesus, and of the willingness to do any hard task to which he was set? It was real, but shallow. It deceived himself. But Christ's words cut down to the inner man, and laid bare for his own inspection the hard core of selfish worldliness which lay beneath. How many radiant enthusiasms, which cheat their subjects quite as much as their beholders, disappear like tinted mist when the hard facts of self-sacrifice strike against them! How much sheer worldliness disguises itself from itself and from others in glistening garments of noble sentiments, which fall at a touch when real giving up is called for, and show the ugly thing below! How much 'religion' goes about the world, and gets made 'a ruler' of the synagogue in recognition of its excellence, which needs but this Ithuriel's spear to start up in its own shape! The completeness and immediateness of the collapse are noticeable. The young man seems to speak no word, and to

take no time for reflection. He stands for a moment as if stunned, and then silently turns away. What a moment! his fate hung on it. Once more we see the awful mystery enacted before our eyes, of a soul gathering up its power to put away life. Who will say that the decision of a moment, which is the outcome of all the past, may not fix the whole future? This man had never before been consciously brought to the fork in the road; but now the two ways are before him, and, knowingly, he chooses the worse. Christ did not desire him to do so; but He did desire that he should choose, and should know that he did. It was the truest kindness to tear away the veil of surface goodness which hid him from himself, and to force him to a conscious decision.

One sign of grace he does give, in that he went away 'sorrowful.' He is not angry nor careless. He cannot see the fair prospect of the eternal life, which he had in some real fashion desired, fade away, without a pang. If he goes back to the world, he goes back feeling more acutely than ever that it cannot satisfy him. He loves it too well to give it up, but not enough to feel that it is enough. Surely, in coming days, that godly sorrow would work a change of the foolish choice, and we may hope that he found no rest till he cast away all else to make Christ his own. A soul which has travelled as far on the road to life eternal as this man had done, can scarcely thereafter walk the broad road of selfishness and death with entire satisfaction.

IV. The section closes with Christ's comment on the sad incident. He speaks no word of condemnation, but passes at once from the individual to the general lesson of the difficulty which rich men (or, as He explains it in Mark, men who 'trust in riches') have in

entering the kingdom. The reflection breathes a tone of pity, and is not so much blame as a merciful recognition of special temptations which affect His judgment, and should modify ours. A camel with its great body, long neck, and hump, struggling to get through a needle's eye, is their emblem. It is a new thing to pity rich men, or to think of their wealth as disqualifying them for anything. The disciples, with childish *naïveté*, wonder. We may wonder that they wondered. They could not understand what sort of a kingdom it was into which capitalists would find entrance difficult. All doors fly open for them to-day, as then. They do not find much difficulty in getting into the church, however hard it may be to get into the kingdom. But it still remains true that the man who has wealth has a hindrance to his religious character, which, like all hindrances, may be made a help by the use he makes of it; and that the man who trusts in riches, which he who possesses them is wofully likely to do, has made the hindrance into a barrier which he cannot pass.

That is a lesson which commercial nations, like England, have need to lay to heart, not as a worn-out saying of the Bible, which means very little for us, but as heavy with significance, and pointing to the special dangers which beset Christian perfection.

So real is the peril of riches, that Christ would have His disciples regard the victory over it as beyond our human power, and beckons us away from the effort to overcome the love of the world in our strength, pointing us to God, in whose mighty grace, breathed into our feeble wills and treacherous hearts, is the only force which can overcome the attraction of perishable riches, and make any of us willing or able to renounce them all that we may win Christ. The young ruler had

just shown that 'with men this is impossible.' Perhaps he still lingered near enough to catch the assurance that the surrender, which had been too much for him to achieve, might yet be joyfully made, since 'with God all things are possible.'

NEAREST TO CHRIST

'To sit on My right hand, and on My left, is not Mine to give, but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared of My Father.'—MATT. xx. 23.

YOU will observe that an unusually long supplement is inserted by our translators in this verse. That supplement is quite unnecessary, and, as is sometimes the case, is even worse than unnecessary. It positively obscures the true meaning of the words before us.

As they stand in our Bibles, the impression that they leave upon one's mind is that Christ in them abjures the power of giving to His disciples their places in the kingdom of heaven, and declares that it belongs not to His function, but relegates it, to His own exclusion, to the Father; whereas what He says is the very opposite of this. He does not put aside the granting of places at His right hand or His left as not being within His province, but He states the principles and conditions on which He does make such a grant, and so is really claiming it as in His province. All that would have been a great deal clearer if our translators had been contented to render the words that they found before them in the Book, without addition, and to read, 'To sit on My right hand, and on My left, is not Mine to give, but to them for whom it is prepared of My Father.'

Another introductory remark may be made, to the

effect that our Lord does not put aside this prayer of His apostles as if they were seeking an impossible thing. It is never safe, I know, to argue from the silence of Scripture. There may be many reasons for that silence beyond our ken in any given case; but still it does strike one as noteworthy that, when this fond mother and her ambitious sons came with their prayer for pre-eminence in His kingdom, our Lord did not answer what would have been so obvious to answer if it had been true, 'You are asking a thing which cannot be granted to anybody, for they are all upon one level in that kingdom of the heavens.' He says by implication the very opposite. Not only does His silence confirm their belief that when He came in His glory, some would be closer to His side than others; but the plain statement of the text is that, in the depth of the eternal counsels, and by the preparation of divine grace, there were thrones nearest to His own which some men should fill. He does *not* say, 'You are asking what cannot be.' He does say, 'There are men for whom it is prepared of My Father.'

And then, still further, Jesus does not condemn the prayer as indicating a wrong state of mind on the part of James and John, though good and bad were strangely mingled in it. We are told nowadays that it is a very selfish thing, far below the lofty height to which our transcendental teachers have attained, to be heartened and encouraged, strengthened and quickened, by the prospect of the crown and the rest that remain for the people of God. If so, Christ ought to have turned round to these men, and have rebuked the passion for reward, which, according to this new light, is so unworthy and so low. But, instead of that, He confines Himself to explaining the condi-

tions on which the fulfilment of the desire is possible, and by implication permits and approves the desire. 'You want to sit on My right hand and on My left, do you? Then be it so. You may do so if you like. Are you ready to accept the conditions? It is well that you should want it,—not for the sake of being above your brethren, but for the sake of being nearest to Me. Hearken! Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of?' They say unto Him (and I do not know that there are anywhere grander words than the calm, swift, unhesitating, modest, and yet confident answer of these two men), 'We are able.' 'You shall have your desire if you fulfil the conditions. It is given to them for whom it is prepared of My Father.'

I. So, then, if we rightly understand these words, and take them without the unfortunate comment which our translators have inserted, they contain, first, the principle that some will be nearer Christ than others in that heavenly kingdom.

As I have said, the words of our Lord do not merely imply, by the absence of all hint that these disciples' petition was impossible, the existence of degrees among the subjects of His heavenly kingdom, but articulately affirm that such variety is provided for by the preparation of the Father. Probably the two brothers thought that they were only asking for pre-eminence in an earthly kingdom, and had no idea that their prayer pointed beyond the grave; but that confusion of thought could not be cured in their then stage of growth, and our Lord therefore leaves it untouched. But the other error, if it were an error, was of a different kind, and might, for aught that one sees, have been set right in a moment. Instead of which the answer adopts it, and seems to set Christ's

own confirmation on it, as being no Jewish dream, but a truth.

They were asking for earth. He answers—for heaven. He leaves them to learn in after days—when the one was slain with the sword, first martyr among the apostles, and the other lived to see them all pass to their thrones, while he remained the ‘companion in tribulation’ of the second generation of the Church—how far off was the fulfilment which they fancied so near.

We need not be surprised that so large a truth should be spoken by Christ so quietly, and as it were incidentally. For that is in keeping with His whole tone when speaking of the unseen world. One knows not whether to wonder more at the decisive authority with which He tells us of that mysterious region, or at the small space which such revelations occupy in His words. There is an air of simplicity and unconsciousness, and withal of authority, and withal of divine reticence about them all, which are in full harmony with the belief that Christ speaking of heaven speaks of that He knows, and testifies that He hath seen.

That truth to which, as we think, our Lord’s words here inevitably lead, is distinctly taught in many other places of Scripture. We should have had less difficulty about it, and should have felt more what a solemn and stimulating thought it is, if we had tried a little more than most of us do to keep clear before us what really is the essential of that future life, what is the lustre of its light, the heaven of heaven, the glory of the glory. Men talk about physical theories of another life. I suppose they are possible. They seem to me infinitely unimportant. Warm imaginations, working by sense,

write books about a future state which wonderfully succeed in making it real by making it earthly. Some of them read more like a book of travels in this world than forecastings of the next. They may be true or not. It does not matter one whit. I believe that heaven is a place. I believe that the corporeity of our future life is essential to the perfection of it. I believe that Christ wears, and will wear for ever, a glorified human body. I believe that that involves locality, circumstance, external occupations; and I say, all that being so, and in its own place very important, yet if we stop there, we have no vision of the real light that makes the lustre, no true idea of the glory that makes the blessedness.

For what is heaven? Likeness to God, love, purity, fellowship with Him; the condition of the spirit and the relation of the soul to Him. The noblest truth about the future world flows from the words of our Master—'This is life eternal, to know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent.' Not 'this brings'; not 'this will lead up to'; not 'this will draw after it'; but 'this is'; and whosoever possesses that eternal life hath already in him the germ of all the glories that are round the throne, and the blessedness that fills the hearts of perfected spirits.

If so, if already eternal life in the bud standeth in the knowledge of God in Christ, what makes its fruitage and completeness? Surely, not physical changes or the circumstances of heaven, at least not these primarily, however much such changes and circumstances may subserve our blessedness there, and the anticipation of them may help our sense-bound hopes here. But the completeness of heaven is the completion of our knowledge of God and Christ,

with all the perfecting of spirit which that implies and produces. The faith, and love, and happy obedience, and consecration which is calm, that partially occupied and ruled the soul here, are to be thought of as enlarged, perfected, delivered from the interruption of opposing thoughts, of sensuous desires, of selfish purposes, of earthly and sinful occupations. And that perfect knowledge and perfect union and perfect likeness are perfect bliss. And that bliss is heaven. And if, whilst heaven is a place, the heaven of heaven be a state, then no more words are needed to show that, then, heaven can be no dead level, nor can all stand at the same stage of attainments, though all be perfect; but that in that solemn company of the blessed, 'the spirits of just men made perfect,' there are indefinitely numerous degrees of approximation to the unattainable Perfection, which stretches above them all, and draws them all to itself. We have not to think of that future life as oppressed, if I may so say, with the unbroken monotony of perfect identity in character and attainments. All indeed are like one another, because all are like Jesus, but that basis of similarity does not exclude infinite variety. The same glory belongs to each, but it is reflected at differing angles and received in divers measures. Perfect blessedness will belong to each, but the capacity to receive it will differ. There will be the same crown on each head, the same song on each lip, the same fulness of joy filling each heart; but star differeth from star, and the great condition of happy intercourse on earth will not be wanting in heaven—a deep-seated similarity and a superficial diversity.

Does not the very idea of an endless progress in that kingdom involve such variety? We do not think of

men passing into the heavens, and being perfected by a bound so as that there shall be no growth. We think of them indeed as being perfected up to the height of their then capacity, from the beginning of that celestial life, so as that there shall be no sin, nor any conscious incompleteness, but not so as that there shall be no progress. And, if they each grow through all the ages, and are ever coming nearer and nearer to Christ, that seems necessarily to lead to the thought that this endless progress, carried on in every spirit, will place them at different points of approximation to the one centre. As in the heavens there are planets that roll nearer the central sun, and others that circle farther out from its rays, yet each keeps its course, and makes music as it moves, as well as planets whose broader disc can receive and reflect more of the light than smaller sister spheres, and yet each blazes over its whole surface and is full to its very rim with white light; so round that throne the spirits of the just made perfect shall move in order and peace—every one blessed, every one perfect, every one like Christ at first, and becoming liker through every moment of the eternities. Each perfected soul looking on his brother shall see there another phase of the one perfectness that blesses and adorns him too, and all taken together shall make up, in so far as finite creatures can make up, the reflection and manifestation of the fulness of Christ. ‘Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us’ is the law for the incompleteness of earth. ‘Having then gifts differing according to the glory that is given to us’ will be the law for the perfection of the heavens. There are those for whom it is prepared of His Father, that they shall sit in special nearness to Him.

II. Still further, these words rightly understood assert that truth which, at first sight, our Authorised Version's rendering seems to make them contradict, viz. that Christ is the giver to each of these various degrees of glory and blessedness. 'It is not Mine to give, save to them for whom it is prepared.' Then it is Thine to give it to them. To deny or to doubt that Christ is the giver of the blessedness, whatsoever the blessedness may be, that fills the hearts and souls of the redeemed, is to destroy His whole work, to destroy all the relations upon which our hopes rest, and to introduce confusion and contradiction into the whole matter.

For Scripture teaches us that He is God's unspeakable gift; that in Him is given to us everything; that He is the bestower of all which we need; that 'out of His fulness,' as one of those two disciples long afterwards said, 'all we have received, and grace for grace.' There is nothing within the compass of God's love to bestow of which Christ is not the giver. There is nothing divine that is done in the heavens and the earth, as I believe, of which Christ is not the doer. The representation of Scripture is uniformly that He is the medium of the activity of the divine nature; that he is the energy of the divine will; that He is, to use the metaphor of the Old Testament, 'the arm of the Lord'—the forthputting of God's power; that He is, to use the profound expression of the New Testament, the Word of the Lord, cognate with, and the utterance of, the eternal nature, the light that streams from the central brightness, the river that flows from the else sealed fountain. As the arm is to the body, and as is the word to the soul, so is Christ to God—the eternal divine utterance and manifestation of the divine

nature. And, therefore, to speak of anything that a man can need and anything that God can give as not being given by Christ, is to strike at the very foundation, not only of our hopes, but at the whole scheme of revealed truth. He is the giver of heaven and everything else which the soul requires.

And then, again, let me remind you that on this matter we are not left to such general considerations as those that I have been suggesting, but that the plain statements of Scripture do confirm the assertion that Christ is the determiner and the bestower of all the differing grades of glory and blessedness yonder. For do we not read of Him that He is the Judge of the whole earth? Do we not read of Him that His word is acquittal and His frown condemnation—that to ‘be accepted of Him’ is the highest aim and end of the Christian life? Do we not read that it is He who says, ‘Come, ye blessed of My Father, enter into the kingdom prepared for you’? Do we not read that the apostle, dying, solaced himself with the thought that ‘there was laid up for him a crown of glory, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, would give him at that day’? And do we not read in the very last book of Scripture, written by one of those two brothers, and containing almost verbal reference to the words of my text, the promise seven times spoken from the immortal lips of the glorified Son of Man, walking in the midst of the candlesticks, ‘To him that overcometh will I give’? The fruit of the tree of life is plucked by His hands for the wearied conquerors. The crown of life is set by Him on the faithful witnesses’ brows. The hidden manna and the new name are bestowed by Him on those who hold fast His name. It is He who gives the victors kingly power over the nations. He clothes in white garments

those who have not defiled their robes. His hand writes upon the triumphant foreheads the name of God. And highest of all, beyond which there is no bliss conceivable, 'To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with Me in My throne.'

Christ is the bestower of the royalties of the heavens as of the redemptions of earth, and it is His to give that which we crave at His hands, when we ask pardon here and glory hereafter. 'To him that is athirst will He give of the water of life freely,' and to him that overcometh will He give the crown of glory.

III. These words lead us, in the third place, to the further thought, that these glorious places are not given to mere wishing, nor by mere arbitrary will.

'You would sit on My right hand and on My left? You think of that pre-eminence as conferred because you chose to ask it—as given by a piece of favouritism. Not so. I cannot make a man foremost in my kingdom in that fashion. There are conditions which must precede such an elevation.'

And there are people who think thus still, as if the mere desire, without anything more, were enough—or as if the felicities of the heavenly world were dependent solely on Christ's arbitrary will, and could be bestowed by an exercise of mere power, as an Eastern prince may make this man his vizier and that other one his water-carrier. The same principles which we have already applied to the elucidation of the idea of varieties and stages of nearness to Christ in His heavenly kingdom have a bearing on this matter. If we rightly understand that the essential blessedness of heaven is likeness to Christ, we shall feel that mere wishing carries no man thither, and that mere sovereign will and power do not avail to set us there.

There are conditions indispensable, from the very nature of the case, and unless they are realised it is as impossible for us to receive, as for Him to give, a place at His side. If, indeed, the future blessedness consisted in mere external circumstances and happier conditions of life, it might be so bestowed. But if place and surroundings, and a more exquisite and ethereal frame, are but subordinate sources of it, and its real fountain is union with Jesus and assimilation to Him, then something else than idle desires must wing the soul that soars thither, and His transforming grace, not His arbitrary will, must set us at His own right hand 'in the heavenly places.'

Of all the profitless occupations with which men waste their lives, none are more utterly useless than wishing without acting. Our wishes are meant to impel us to the appropriate forms of energy by which they can be realised. When a pauper becomes a millionaire by sitting and vehemently wishing that he were rich, when ignorance becomes learning by standing in a library and wishing that the contents of all these books were in its head, there will be some hope that the gates of heaven will fly open to your desire. But till then, 'many, I say unto you, shall seek to enter in and not be able.' Many shall *seek*; you must *strive*. For wishing is one thing, and *willing* is another, and *doing* is yet another. And in regard to entrance into Christ's kingdom, our 'doing' is trusting in Him who has done all for us. 'This is the work of God, that ye should believe on Him whom He hath sent.' Does our wish lead us to the acceptance of the condition? Then it will be fulfilled. If not, it will remain fruitless, will die into apathy, or will live as a pang and a curse.

You wish, or fancy you wish, to pass into heaven

when you die, I suppose. Some of its characteristics attract you. You believe in punishment for sin, and you would willingly escape that. You believe in a place of rest after toil, of happiness after sorrow, where nipping frosts of disappointment, and wild blasts of calamity, and slow, gnawing decay no more harm and kill your joys—and you would like that. But do you wish to be pure and stainless, to have your hearts fixed on God alone, to have your whole being filled with Him, and emptied of self and sense and sin? The peace of heaven attracts you—but its praise repels, does it not? Its happiness draws your wishes—does its holiness seem inviting? It would be joyful to be far away from punishment—would it be as joyful to be near Christ? Ah! no; the wishes lead to no resolve, and therefore to no result, for this among other reasons, because they are only kindled by a part of the whole, and are exchanged for positive aversion when the real heaven of heaven is presented to your thoughts. Many a man who, by the set of his whole life, is drifting daily nearer and nearer to that region of outer darkness, is conscious of an idle wish for peace and joy beyond the grave. In common matters a man may be devoured by vain desires all his lifetime, because he will not pass beyond wishing to acting accordingly. ‘The desire of the slothful killeth him; because his hands refused to labour, he coveteth greedily all the day long.’ And with like but infinitely more tragical issues do these vain wishes for a place in that calm world, where nothing but holiness enters, gnaw at many a soul. ‘Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his,’ was the aspiration of that Gentile prophet, whose love of the world obscured even the prophetic illumination which he possessed—

and his epitaph is a stern comment on the uselessness of such empty wishes, 'Balaam, the son of Beor, they slew with the sword.' It needs more than a wish to set us at Christ's right hand in His kingdom.

Nor can such a place be given by mere arbitrary will. Christ could not, if He would, set a man at His right hand whose heart was not the home of simple trust and thankful love, whose nature and desires were unprepared for that blessed world. It would be like taking one of those creatures—if there be such—that live on the planet whose orbit is farthest from the sun, accustomed to cold, organised for darkness, and carrying it to that great central blaze, with all its fierce flames and tongues of fiery gas that shoot up a thousand miles in a moment. It would crumble and disappear before its blackness could be seen against the blaze.

His loving will embraces us all, and is the foundation of all our hopes. But it had to reach its purpose by a bitter road which He did not shrink from travelling. He desires to save us, and to realise the desire He had to die. 'It became Him for whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the Captain of their salvation perfect through suffering.' What He had to do, we have to accept. Unless we accept the mercy of God in Christ, no wish on our parts, nor any exercise of power on His, will carry us to the heaven which He has died to open, and of which He is at once the giver and the gift.

IV. These glorious places are given as the result of a divine preparation.

'To them for whom it is prepared of My Father.' We have seen that Christ is not to be regarded as abjuring the office, with which His disciples' confidence led them to invest Him—that of allotting to His

servants their place in His kingdom. He neither refers it to the Father without Himself, nor claims it for Himself without the Father. The living unity of will and work which subsists between the Father and the Son forbids such a separation and distribution of office. And that unity is set forth on both its sides in His own deep words, 'The Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He seeth the Father do: for whatsoever things He doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise.'

So, then, while the gift of thrones at His side is His act and the Father's, in like manner the preparation of the royal seats for their occupants, and of the kings for their thrones, is the Father's act and His.

Our text does not tell us directly what that preparation is, any more than it tells us directly what the principles are on which entrance into and pre-eminence in the kingdom are granted. But we know enough in regard to both, for our practical guidance, for the vigour of our hope, and the grasp of our faith.

There is a twofold divine preparation of the heavens for men. One is from of old. The kingdom is 'prepared for you before the foundation of the world.' That preparation is in the eternal counsel of the divine love, which calleth the things that are not as though they were, and before which all that is evolved in the generations of men and the epochs of time, lies on one plane, equally near to Him from whose throne diverge far beneath the triple streams of past, present, and future.

And beside that preparation, the counsel of pardoning mercy and redeeming grace, there is the other preparation—the realisation of that eternal purpose in time through the work of Jesus Christ our Lord. His consolation to His disciples in the parting hour was, 'I

go to prepare a place for you.' How much was included in these words we shall never know till we, like Him, see of the travail of His soul, and like Him are satisfied. But we can dimly see that on the one hand His death, and on the other hand His entrance into that holiest of all, make ready for us the many mansions of the Father's house. He was crucified for our offences, He was raised again for our justification, He is passed through the heavens to stand our Forerunner in the presence of God—and by all these mighty acts He prepares the heavenly places for us. As the sun behind a cloud, which hides it from us, is still pouring out its rays on far-off lands, so He, veiled in dark, sunset clouds of Calvary, sent the energy of His passion and cross into the unseen world and made it possible that we should enter there. 'When Thou didst overcome the sharpness of death, Thou didst open the gates of the kingdom of heaven to all believers.' As one who precedes a mighty host provides and prepares rest for their weariness, and food for their hunger, in some city on their line of march, and having made all things ready, is at the gates to welcome their travel-stained ranks when they arrive, and guide them to their repose; so He has gone before, our Forerunner, to order all things for us there. It may be that unless Christ were in heaven, our brother as well as our Lord, it were no place for mortals. It may be that we need to have His glorified bodily presence in order that it should be possible for human spirits to bear the light, and be at home with God. Be that as it may, this we know, that the Father prepares a place for us by the eternal counsel of His love, and by the all-sufficient work of Christ, by whom we have access to the Father.

And as His work is the Father's preparation of the

place for us by the Son, the issue of His work is the Father's preparation of us for the place, through the Son, by the Spirit. 'He that hath wrought us for the self-same thing is God.'

If so, then what follows? This, among other things, that wishes are vain, for heaven is no gift of arbitrary favouritism, but that faith in Christ, and faith alone, leads us to His right hand—and the measure of our faith and growing Christlikeness here, will be the measure of our glory hereafter, and of our nearness to Him. It is possible to be 'saved, *yet so as by fire.*' It is possible to have 'an entrance ministered unto us *abundantly* into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.' If we would be near Him then, we must be near Him now. If we would share His throne, we must bear His cross. If we would be found in the likeness of His resurrection, we must be 'conformable unto His death.' Then such desires as these true-hearted, and yet mistaken, disciples expressed will not be the voice of selfish ambition, but of dependent love. They will not be vain wishes, but be fulfilled by Him, who, stooping from amid the royalties of heaven, with love upon His face and pity in His heart, will give more than we ask. 'Seekest thou a place at My right hand? Nay, I give thee a more wondrous dignity. To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with Me in My throne.'

THE SERVANT-LORD AND HIS SERVANTS

'Even as the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister.'

MATT. XX. 28.

It seems at first sight strangely unsympathetic and irrelevant that the ambitious request of James and

John and their foolish mother, that they should sit at Christ's right hand and His left in His kingdom, should have been occasioned by, and have followed immediately upon, our Lord's solemn and pathetic announcement of His sufferings. But the connection is not difficult to trace. The disciples believed that, in some inexplicable way, the sufferings which our Lord was shadowing forth were to be the immediate precursors of His assuming His regal dignity. And so they took time by the forelock, as they thought, and made haste to ensure their places in the kingdom, which they believed was now ready to burst upon them. Other occasions in the Gospels in which we find similar quarrelling among the disciples as to pre-eminence are similarly associated with references made by our Lord to His approaching crucifixion. On a former occasion He cured these misplaced ambitions by setting a child in the midst of them. On this He cures them by a still more pathetic and wonderful example, His own; and He says, 'I, in My lowliness and service, am to be your Pattern. In Me see the basis of all true greatness, and the right use of all influence and authority. The Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister.'

I. So, then, let us look first at the perfect life of service of the Servant-Lord.

Now, in order to appreciate the significance of that life of service, we must take into account the introductory words, 'The Son of Man came.' They declare His pre-existence, His voluntary entrance into the conditions of humanity, and His denuding Himself of 'the glory which He had with the Father before the world was.' We shall never understand the Servant-Christ until we understand that He is the Eternal Son of the

Father. His service began long before any of His acts of sympathetic and self-forgetting lowliness rendered help to the miserable here upon earth. His service began when He laid aside, not the garments of earth, but the vesture of the heavens, and girded Himself, not with the cincture woven in man's looms, but with the flesh of our humanity, 'and being found in fashion as a man,' bowed Himself to enter into the conditions of earth. This was the first, the chiefest of all His acts of service, and the sanctity and awfulness of it run through the list of all His deeds and make them unspeakably great. It was much that His hands should heal, that His lips should comfort, that His heart should bleed with sympathy for sorrow. But, oh! it was more that He *had* hands to touch, lips to speak to human hearts, and the heart of a man and a brother to feel *with* as well as *for* us. 'The Son of Man came'—there is the transcendent example of the true use of greatness; there is the conspicuous instance of the true basis of authority and rule. For it was because He was 'found in fashion as a Man' that He has won a 'name that is above every name,' and that there have accrued to Him the 'many crowns' which He wears at the Father's side.

But then, passing beyond this, we may dwell, though all imperfectly, upon the features, familiar as they are, of that wonderful life of self-oblivious and self-sacrificing ministration to others. Think of the purity of the source from all which these wonders and blessednesses of service for man flowed. The life of Jesus Christ is self-forgetting love made visible. Scientists tell us* that, by the arrangement of particles of sand upon plates of glass, there can be made, as it were, perceptible to the eye, the sweetness of musical sounds;

and each note when struck will fling the particles into varying forms of beauty. The life of Jesus Christ presents in shapes of loveliness and symmetry the else invisible music of a divine love. He lets us see the rhythm of the Father's heart. The source from which His ministrations have flowed is the pure source of a perfect love. Ancient legends consolidated the sunbeams into the bright figure of the far-darting god of light. And so the sunbeams of the divine love have, as it were, drawn themselves together and shaped themselves into the human form of the Son of Man who 'came not to be ministered unto, but to minister.'

No taint of bye-ends was in that service; no side-long glances at possible advantages of influence or reputation or the like, which so often deform men's philanthropies and services to one another. No more than the sunbeam shines for the sake of collateral issues which may benefit itself, did Jesus Christ seek His own advantage in ministering to men. There was no speck of black in that lustrous white robe, but all was perfectly unselfish love. Like the clear sea, weedless and stainless, that laves the marble steps of the palaces of Venice, the deep ocean of Christ's service to man was pure to the depths throughout.

That perfect ministry of the Servant-Lord was rendered with strange spontaneity and cheerfulness. One of the evangelists says, in a very striking and beautiful phrase, that 'He healed them that had need of healing,' as if the presence of the necessity evoked the supply, by the instinctive action of a perfect love. There was never in Him one trace of reluctance to have leisure broken in upon, repose disturbed, or even communion with God abbreviated. All men could come always; they never came inopportunately. We often

cheerfully take up a burden of service, but find it very hard to continue bearing it. But He was willing to come down from the mountain of Transfiguration because there was a demoniac boy in the plain; and therefore He put aside the temptation—‘Let us build here three tabernacles.’ He was willing to abandon His desert seclusion because the multitude sought Him. Interrupted in His communion with the Father by His disciples, He had no impatient word to say, but ‘Let us go into other cities also, for therefore am I sent.’ When He stepped from the fishing-boat on the other side of the lake to which He had fled for a moment of repose, He was glad when He saw the multitude who had pertinaciously outrun Him, and were waiting for Him on the beach. On His Cross He had leisure to turn from His own physical sufferings and the weight of a world’s sin, which lay upon Him, to look at that penitent by His side, and He ended His life in the ministry of mercy to a brigand. And thus cheerfully, and always without a thought of self, ‘He came to minister.’

Think, too, of the sweep of His ministrations. They took in all men; they were equally open to enemies and to friends, to mockers and to sympathisers. Think of the variety of the gifts which He brought in His ministry—caring for body and for soul; alleviating sorrow, binding up wounds, purifying hearts; dealing with sin, the fountain, and with miseries, its waters, with equal helpfulness and equal love.

And think of how that ministering was always ministration by ‘the LORD.’ For there is nothing to me more remarkable in the Gospel narrative than the way in which, side by side, there lie in Christ’s life the two elements, so difficult to harmonise in fact, and

so impossible to have been harmonised in a legend, the consciousness of authority and the humility of a servant. The paradox with which John introduces his sweet pathetic story of our Lord's washing the disciples' feet is true of, and is illustrated by, every instance of more than ordinary lowliness and self-oblivion which the Gospel contains. 'Jesus, knowing that He had come from God, and went to God, and that the Father had given all things into His hand'—did what? 'Laid aside His garments and took a towel and girded Himself.' The two things ever go together. And thus, in His lowliest abasement, as in a star entangled in a cloud, there shine out, all the more broad and conspicuous for the environment which wraps them, the beams of His uncreated lustre.

That ministration was a service that never shrank from stern rebuke. His service was no mere soft and pliant, sympathetic helpfulness, but it could smite and stab, and be severe, and knit its brow, and speak stern words, as all true service must. For it is not service but cruelty to sympathise with the sinner, and say nothing in condemnation of his sin. And yet no sternness is blessed which is not plainly prompted by desire to help.

Now, I know far better than you do how wretchedly inadequate all these poor words of mine have been to the great theme that I have been trying to speak of, but they may at least—like a little water poured into a pump—have set your minds working upon the theme, and, I hope, to better purpose. 'The Son of Man came . . . to minister.'

II. Now, secondly, note the service that should be modelled on His.

Oh! brethren, if we, however imperfectly, have taken into mind and heart that picture of Him who was and *is* amongst us as 'One that serveth,' how sharp a test, and how stringent, and, as it seems to us sometimes, impossible, a commandment are involved in the 'even as' of my text. When we think of our grudging services; when we think of how much more apt we are to insist upon what men owe to us than of what we owe to them; how ready we are to demand, how slow we are to give; how we flame up in what we think is warranted indignation if we do not get the observance, or the sympathy, or the attention that we require, and yet how little we give of these, we may well say, 'Thou hast set a pattern that can only drive us to despair.' If we would read our Gospels more than we do with the feeling, as we trace that Master through each of His phases of sympathy and self-oblivion and self-sacrifice and service, 'that is what I should be,' what a different book the New Testament would be to us, and what different people you and I would be!

There is no ground on which we can rest greatness or superiority in Christ's kingdom except this ground of service. And there is no use that we can make either of money or of talents, of acquirements or opportunities, except the use of helping our fellows with them, which will stand the test of this model and example. 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.' The servant who serves for love is highest in the hierarchy of Heaven. God, who is supreme, has stooped lower than any that are beneath Him, and His true rule follows, not because He is infinite, omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, or any of those other pompous Latin words which describe what men

call His attributes, but because He loves best, and does most for the most. And that is what you and I ought to be. We may well take the lesson to ourselves. I have no space, and, I hope, no need to enlarge upon it; but be sure of this, that if we are ever to be near the right and the left of the Master in His kingdom, there is one way, and only one way, to come thither, and that is to make self abdicate its authority as the centre of our lives, and to enthrone there Christ, and for His sake all our brethren. Be ambitious to be first, but remember, *Noblesse oblige*. He that is first must become last. He that is Servant of all is Master of all. That is the only mastery that is worth anything, the devotion of hearts that circle round the source from which they draw light and warmth. What is it that makes a mother the queen of her children? Simply that all her life she has been their servant, and never thought about herself, but always about them.

Now much might be said as to the application of these threadbare principles in the Church and in society, but I do not enlarge on that; only let me say in a word—that here is the one law on which pre-eminence in the Church is to be allocated.

What becomes of sacerdotal hierarchies, what becomes of the ‘lords over God’s heritage,’ if the one ground of pre-eminence is service? I know, of course, that there may be different forms embodying one principle, but it seems to me that that form of Church polity is nearest the mind of Christ in which the only dignity is dignity of service, and the only use of place is the privilege of stooping and helping.

This fruitful principle will one day shape civil as well as ecclesiastical societies. For the present, our

Lord draws a contrast between the worldly and the Christian notions of rank and dignity. 'It shall not be so among you,' says He. And the nobler conception of eminence and service set forth in His disciples, if they are true to their Lord and their duty, will leaven, and we may hope finally transform society, sweeping away all vulgar notions of greatness as depending on birth, or wealth, or ruder forms of powers, and marshalling men according to Christ's order of precedence, in which helpfulness is pre-eminence and service is supremacy, while conversely pre-eminence is used to help and superiority stoops to serve.

One remark will close my sermon. You have to take the last words of this verse if you are ever going to put in practice its first words. 'Even as the Son of Man came, not to be ministered unto, but to minister,'—if Jesus Christ had stopped there He would only have been one more of the long roll of ineffectual preachers and prophets who show men the better way, and leave them struggling in the mire. But He did not stop there: 'Even as the Son of Man came . . . to give His life a ransom for many.'

Ah! the Cross, with its burden of the sacrifice for the world's sin, is the only power which will supply us with a sufficient motive for the loftiness of Christ-like service. I know that there is plenty of entirely irreligious and Christless beneficence in the world. And God forbid that I should say a word to seem to depreciate that. But sure I am that for the noblest, purest, most widely diffused and blessedly operative kinds of service of man, there is no motive and spring anywhere except 'He loved me, and gave Himself for me.' And, bought by that service and that blood, it

will be possible, and it is obligatory upon all of us, to 'do unto others,' as He Himself said, 'as I have done to you.' 'The servant is not greater than his Lord.'

WHAT THE HISTORIC CHRIST TAUGHT ABOUT HIS DEATH

'The Son of Man came . . . to give His life a ransom for many.'—MATT. xx. 8.

WE hear a great deal at present about going back to 'the Christ of the Gospels.' In so far as that phrase and the movement of thought which it describes are a protest against the substitution of doctrines for the Person whom the doctrines represent, I, for one, rejoice in it. But I believe that the antithesis suggested by the phrase, and by some of its advocates avowed, between the Christ of the Gospels and the Christ of the Epistles, is false. The Christ of the Gospels is the Christ of the Epistles, as I humbly venture to believe. And I cannot but see that there is a possibility of a movement which, carried out legitimately, should command the fullest sympathy of every Christian heart, degenerating into the rejection of all the supernatural elements in the nature and work of our Lord, and leaving us with a meagre human Christ, shrunken and impotent. The Christ of the Gospels, by all means; but let it be the whole Christ of all the Gospels, the Christ over whose cradle angels sang, by whose empty grave angels watched, whose ascending form angels beheld and proclaimed that He should come again to be our Judge. Go back to that Christ, and all will be well.

Now it seems to me that one direction in which there is a possibility of such movement as I have referred

to being one-sided and harmful is in reference to the conception which we form of the death of Jesus Christ. And therefore I ask you to listen for a few moments to me at this time whilst I try to bring out what is plain in the words before us; and is, as I humbly believe, interwoven in the whole texture of all the Gospels—viz., the conception which Jesus Christ Himself formed of the meaning of His death.

I. The first thing that I notice is that the Christ of the Gospels thought and taught that His death was to be His own act.

I do not think that it is an undue or pedantic pressing of the significance of the words before us, if I ask you to notice two of the significant expressions in this text. 'The Son of Man *came*,' and came 'to *give* His life.' The one word refers to the act of entrance into, the other to the act of departure from, this earthly life. They correspond in so far as that both bring into prominence Christ's own consent, volition, and action in the very two things about which men are least consulted, their being born and their dying.

'The Son of Man *came*.' Now if that expression occurred but once it might be minimised as being only a synonym for birth, having no special force. But if you will notice that it is our Lord's habitual word about Himself, only varied occasionally by another one equally significant when he says that He 'was sent'; and if you will further notice that all through the Gospels He never but once speaks of Himself as being 'born,' I think you will admit that I am not making too much of a word when I say that when Christ, out of the depths of His consciousness, said 'the Son of Man *came*,' He was teaching us that He lived before He was born, and that behind

the natural fact of birth there lay the supernatural fact of His choosing to be incarnated for man's redemption. The one instance in which He does speak of Himself as 'being born' is most instructive in this connection. For it was before the Roman governor; and He accompanied the clause in which He said, 'To this end was I born'—which was adapted to Pilate's level of intelligence—with another one which seemed to be inserted to satisfy His own sense of fitness, rather than for any light that it would give to its first hearer, 'And for this cause came I into the world.' The two things were not synonymous; but before the birth there was the coming, and Jesus was born because the Eternal Word willed to come. So says the Christ of the Gospels; and the Christ of the Epistles is represented as 'taking upon Him the form of a servant, and being found in fashion as a man.' Do you accept that as true of 'the historic Christ'?

With precise correspondence, if we turn to the other end of His life, we find the equally significant expression in my text which asserts for it, too, that the other necessity to which men necessarily and without their own volition bow was to Christ a matter of choice. 'The Son of Man came to *give*.' 'No man taketh it from Me,' as He said on another occasion. 'I lay it down of Myself.' 'The Good Shepherd giveth His life for the sheep.' 'My flesh . . . I give for the world's life.' Now, brethren, we are not to regard these words as mere vague expressions for a willing surrender to the necessity of death, but as expressing what I believe is taught us all through Scripture, and is fundamental to any real grasp of the real Christ, that He died because He chose, and chose because He loved. What meant that 'loud voice' with which He said 'It is finished,' but

that there was no physical exhaustion, such as was usually the immediate occasion of death by crucifixion? What meant that surprising rapidity with which the last moment came in His case, to the astonishment of the stolid bystanders? They meant the same thing as I believe that the Evangelists meant when they, with one consent, employed expressions to describe Christ's death, which may indeed be only euphemisms, but are apparently declarations of its voluntary character. 'He gave up the ghost.' 'He yielded His Spirit.' He breathed forth His life, and so He died.

As one of the old fathers said, 'Who is this that thus falls asleep when He wills? To die is weakness, but thus to die is power.' 'The weakness of God is stronger than man.' The desperate king of Israel bade his slave kill him, and when the menial shrunk from such sacrilege he fell upon his own sword. Christ bade His servant Death, 'Do this,' and he did it; and dying, our Lord and Master declared Himself the Lord and Master of Death. This is a part of the history of the historic Christ. Do you believe it?

II. Then, secondly, the Christ of the Gospels thought and taught that His death was one chief aim of His coming.

I have omitted words from my text which intervene between its first and its last ones; not because I regard them as unimportant, but because they would lead us into too wide a field to cover in one sermon. But I would pray you to observe how the re-insertion of them throws immense light upon the significance of the words which I have chosen. 'The Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister.' That covers the whole ground of His gracious and gentle dealings here on earth, His tenderness, self-abnega-

tion, sympathy, healing, and helpfulness. Then, side by side with that, and as the crowning manifestation of His work of service, without which His life—gracious, radiant, sweet as it is—would still want something of its power, He sets His death.

Surely that is an altogether unexampled phenomenon; altogether a unique and unparalleled thing, that a *man* should regard that which for all workers, thinkers, speakers, poets, philanthropists, is the sad term of their activity, as being a part of His work; and not only a part, but so conspicuous a part that it was a purpose which He had in view from the very beginning, and before the beginning, of His earthly life. So Calvary was to Jesus Christ no interruption, tragic and premature, of His life's activities. His death was no mere alternative set before Him, which He chose rather than be unfaithful or dumb. He did not die because He was hounded by hostile priests, but He came on purpose that He might so end His career.

I need not remind you of, and space would not permit me to dwell upon, other instances in the Gospels in which our Lord speaks the same language. At the very beginning of His public ministry He told the inquiring rabbi, who came to Him with the notion that He would be somewhat flattered by His recognition by one of the authoritative and wise pundits of the nation, that 'the Son of Man must be lifted up.' The necessity was before Him, but it was no unwelcome necessity, for it sprung from His own love. It was the very aim of His coming, to live a Servant and to die a Ransom.

Dear brethren, let me press upon you this plain truth, that no conception of Christ's death which looks

upon it merely as the close, by pathetic sufferings, of a life to the activities of which it adds nothing but pathos, approaches the signification of it which inheres in the thought that this was the aim and purpose with which Jesus Christ was incarnate, that He should live indeed the pure and sweet life which He lived, but equally that He should die the painful and bitter death which He died. He was not merely a martyr, though the first of them, but something far more, as we shall see presently. If to you the death of Jesus Christ is the same in kind, however superior in degree, as those of patriots and reformers and witnesses for the truth and martyrs for righteousness, then I humbly venture to represent that, instead of going back to, you have gone away from, the Christ of the Gospels, who said, 'The Son of Man came . . . to give His life'; and that such a Christ is not a historic but an imaginary one.

III. So, thirdly, notice that the Christ of the Gospels thought and taught that His death was a ransom.

A ransom is a price paid in exchange for captives that they may be liberated; or for culprits that they may be set free. And that was Christ's thought of what He had to die for. There lay the 'must.'

I do not dwell upon the conception of our condition involved in that word. We are all bound and held by the chain of our sins. We all stand guilty before God, and, as I believe, there is a necessity in that loving divine nature whereby it is impossible that without a ransom there can be, in the interests of mankind and in the interests of righteousness, forgiveness of sins. I do not mean that in the words before us there is a developed theory of atonement, but I do mean that no man, dealing with them fairly, can strike out of them

the notion of vicarious suffering in exchange for, or instead of, 'the many.' This is no occasion for theological discussion, nor am I careful now to set forth a fully developed doctrine; but I am declaring, as God helps me, what is to me, and I pray may be to you, the central thought about that Cross of Calvary, that on it there is made the sacrifice for the world's sins.

And, dear brethren, I beseech you to consider, how can we save the character of Jesus Christ, accepting these Gospels, which on the hypothesis about which I am now speaking are valid sources of knowledge, without recognising that He deliberately led His disciples to believe that He died for—that is, instead of—them that put their trust in Him? For remember that not only such words as these of my text are to be taken into account. Remember that it was the Christ of the Gospels who established that last rite of the Lord's Supper, in which the broken bread, and the separation between the bread and the wine, both indicated a violent death, and who said about both the one and the other of the double symbols, 'For you.' I do not understand how any body of professing believers, rejecting Christ's death as the sacrifice for sin, can find a place in their beliefs or in their practice for that institution of the Lord's Supper, or can rightly interpret the sacred words then spoken. This is why the Cross was Christ's aim. This is why He said, with His dying breath, 'It is finished.' This truth is the explanation of His words, 'The Good Shepherd giveth His life for the sheep.'

And this truth of a ransom-price lies at the basis of all vigorous Christianity. A Christianity without a dying Christ is a dying Christianity. And history shows us that the expansiveness and elevating power

of the Gospel depend on the prominence given to the sacrifice on the Cross. An old fable says that the only thing that melts adamant is the blood of a lamb. The Gospel reveals the precious blood of Jesus Christ, His death for us as a ransom, as the one power which subdues hostility and binds hearts to Him. The Christ of the Gospels is the Christ who taught that He died for us.

IV. Lastly, the Christ of the Gospels thought and taught that His death had world-wide power.

He says here, 'A ransom for *many*.' Now that word is not used in this instance in contradistinction to 'all,' nor in contradistinction to 'few.' It is distinctly employed as emphasising the contrast between the single death and the wide extent of its benefits; and in terms which, rigidly taken, simply express indefiniteness, it expresses universality. That that is so seems to me to be plain enough, if we notice other places of Scripture to which, at this stage of my sermon, I can but allude. For instance, in Romans v. the two expressions, 'the many' and the 'all,' alternate in reference to the extent of the power of Christ's sacrifice for men. And the Apostle in another place, where probably there may be an allusion to the words of the text, so varies them as that he declares that Jesus Christ in His death was the ransom 'instead of all.' But I do not need to dwell upon these. 'Many' is a vague word, and in it we see dim crowds stretching away beyond our vision, for whom that death was to be the means of salvation. I take it that the words of our text have an allusion to those in the great prophecy in the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah, in which we read, 'By His knowledge shall My righteous Servant' (mark the allusion in our text, 'Who came to *minister*') 'justify many, for He shall bear their iniquities.'

So, brethren, I believe that I am not guilty of unduly widening out our Lord's thought when I say that the indefinite 'many' is practically 'all.' And, brother, if 'all,' then *you*; if all, then *me*; if all, then *each*. Think of a man, nineteen centuries ago, away in a little insignificant corner of the world, standing up and saying, 'My death is the price paid in exchange for the world!' That is meekness and lowliness of heart, is it? That is humility, so beautiful in a teacher, is it? How any man can accept the veracity of these narratives, believe that Jesus Christ said anything the least like this, not believe that He was the Divine Son of the Father, the Sacrifice for the world's sin, and yet profess—and honestly profess, I doubt not, in many cases—to retain reverence and admiration, all but adoration, for Him, I confess that I, for my poor part, cannot understand.

But I ask you, what you are going to do with these thoughts and teachings of the Christ of the Gospels. Are you going to take them for true? Are you going to trust your salvation to Him? Are you going to accept the ransom and say, 'O Lord, truly I am Thy servant; Thou hast loosed my bonds'? Brethren, the Christ of the Gospels, by all means; but the Christ that said, 'The Son of Man came to . . . give His life a ransom for many.' My Christ, and your Christ, and the world's Christ is 'the Christ that died; yea, rather, that is risen again; who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.'

THE COMING OF THE KING TO HIS PALACE

'And when they drew nigh unto Jerusalem, and were come to Bethphage, unto the mount of Olives, then sent Jesus two disciples, 2. Saying unto them, Go into the village over against you, and straightway ye shall find an ass tied, and a colt with her: loose them, and bring them unto Me. 3. And if any man say ought unto you, ye shall say, The Lord hath need of them; and straightway he will send them. 4. All this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, 5. Tell ye the daughter of Sion, Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass. 6. And the disciples went, and did as Jesus commanded them, 7. And brought the ass, and the colt, and put on them their clothes, and they set Him thereon. 8. And a very great multitude spread their garments in the way; others cut down branches from the trees, and strawed them in the way. 9. And the multitudes that went before, and that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna to the Son of David: Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest. 10. And when He was come into Jerusalem, all the city was moved, saying, Who is this? 11. And the multitude said, This is Jesus the prophet of Nazareth of Galilee. 12. And Jesus went into the temple of God, and cast out all them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the moneychangers, and the seats of them that sold doves, 13. And said unto them, It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves. 14. And the blind and the lame came to Him in the temple; and He healed them. 15. And when the chief priests and scribes saw the wonderful things that He did, and the children crying in the temple, and saying, Hosanna to the Son of David, they were sore displeased, 16. And said unto Him, Hearst Thou what these say? And Jesus saith unto them, Yea; have ye never read, Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings Thou hast perfected praise?'—MATT. xxi. 1-16.

JESUS spent His last Sabbath in the quiet home at Bethany with Lazarus and his sisters. Some sense of His approaching death tinged the modest festivities of that evening with sadness, and spoke in Mary's 'anointing of His body for the burying.' The pause was brief, and, with the dawn of Sunday, He set Himself again to tread the road to the cross. Who can doubt that He felt the relief of that momentary relaxation of the strain on His spirit, and the corresponding pressure of its renewed tightening? This passage shows Him putting out from the quiet haven and facing the storm again. It is in two main sections, dealing respectively with the royal procession, and the acts of the King in the temple.

I. The procession of the King. The first noteworthy point is that our Lord initiates the whole incident, and

deliberately sets Himself to evoke the popular enthusiasm, by a distinct voluntary fulfilment of a Messianic prophecy. The allusion to the prophecy, in His sending for the colt and mounting it, may have escaped the disciples and the crowds of pilgrims; but they rightly caught His intention to make a solemn triumphal entry into the city, and responded with a burst of enthusiasm, which He expected and wished. The poor garments flung hastily on the animals, the travel-stained cloaks cast on the rocky path, the branches of olive and palm waved in the hands, and the tumult of acclaim, which shrilly echoed the words of the psalm, and proclaimed Him to be the Son of David, are all tokens that the crowds hailed Him as their King, and were all permitted and welcomed by Him. All this is in absolute opposition to His usual action, which had been one long effort to damp down inflammable and unspiritual Messianic hopes, and to avoid the very enthusiasm which now surges round Him unchecked. Certainly that calm figure, sitting on the slow-pacing ass, with the noisy multitude pressing round Him, is strangely unlike Him, who hid Himself among the hills when they sought to make Him a King. His action is the more remarkable, if it be remembered that the roads were alive with pilgrims, most of whom passing through Bethany would be Galileans; that they had seen Lazarus walking about the village, and knew who had raised him; that the Passover festival was *the* time in all the year when popular tumults were to be expected; and that the crowds going to Jerusalem were met by a crowd coming from it, bent on seeing the doer and the subject of the great miracle. Into this heap of combustibles our Lord puts a light. He must have meant that it should blaze as it did.

What is the reason for this contrast? The need for the former reticence no longer existed. There was no fear now of His teaching and ministry being interrupted by popular outburst. He knew that it was finished, and that His hour had come. Therefore, the same motive of filial obedience which had led Him to avoid what would prevent His discharging His Father's commission, now impelled Him to draw the attention of the nation and its rulers to the full extent of His claims, and to put the plain issue of their acceptance or rejection in the most unmistakable manner. A certain divine decorum, if we may so call it, required that once He should enter the city as its King. Some among the shouting crowds might have their enthusiasm purified and spiritualised, if once it were directed to Him. It was for us, no less than for them, that this one interruption of His ordinary method was adopted by Him, that we too might ponder the fact that He laid His hand on that magnificent prophecy, and said, 'It is mine. I am the King.'

The royal procession is also a revelation of the character of the King and the nature of His kingdom. A strange King this, indeed, who has not even an ass of His own, and for followers, peasants with palm branches instead of swords! What would a Roman soldier or one of Herod's men have thought of that rustic procession of a pauper prince on an ass, and a hundred or two of weaponless, penniless men? Christ's one moment of royal pomp is as eloquent of His humiliation as the long stretch of His lowly life is. And yet, as is always the case, side by side with the lowliness there gleams the veiled splendour. He had to borrow the colt, and the message in which He asks for it is a strange paradox. 'The Lord hath need of

him'—so great was the poverty of so great a King. But it spoke, too, of a more than human knowledge, and of an authority which had only to require in order to receive. Some farming villager, no doubt, who was a disciple but secretly, gladly yielded his beasts. The prophecy which Matthew quotes, with the omission of some words, from Zechariah, and the addition of the first clause from Isaiah, is symbolic, and would have been amply fulfilled in the mission and character of Christ, though this event had never taken place. But just as it is symbolic, so this external fulfilment, which is intended to point to the real fulfilment, is also symbolic. The chariot and the horse are the emblems of conquerors. It is fitting that the Prince of Peace should make His state entry on a colt, unriden before, and saddled only with a garment. Zechariah meant that Zion's King should not reign by the right of the strongest, and that all His triumphs should be won by lowly meekness. Christ meant the same by His remarkable act. And has not the picture of Him, throned thus, stamped for ever on the imagination of the world a profounder sense of the inmost nature of His kingdom than many words would have done? Have we learned the lesson of the gentleness which belongs to His kingdom, and of the unchristian character of war and violence? Do we understand what the Psalmist meant when he sang, 'In thy majesty ride on prosperously, because of . . . meekness'? Let us not forget the other picture, 'Behold, a white horse, and He that sat thereon, called Faithful and True; and in righteousness He doth judge and make war.'

The entry may remind us also of the worthlessness of mere enthusiastic feeling in reference to Jesus Christ. The day was the Sunday. How many of that

crowd were shouting as loudly, 'Crucify Him!' and 'Not this man, but Barabbas!' on the Friday? The palm-branches had not faded, where they had been tossed, before the fickle crowd had swung round to the opposite mood. Perhaps the very exuberance of feeling at the beginning, had something to do with the bitterness of the execrations at the end, of the week. He had not answered their expectations, but, instead of heading a revolt, had simply taught in the temple, and meekly let Himself be laid hold of. Nothing succeeds like success, and no idol is so quickly forsaken as the idol of a popular rising. All were eager to disclaim connection with Him, and to efface the remembrance of their Sunday's hosannas by their groans round His gibbet. But there is a wider lesson here. No enthusiasm can be too intense which is based upon a true sense of our need of Christ, and of His work for us; but it is easy to excite apparently religious emotion by partial presentations of Him, and such excitement foams itself away by its very violence, like some Eastern river that in winter time dashes down the wady with irresistible force, and in summer is bone dry. Unless we know Christ to be the Saviour of our souls and the Lamb of God, we shall soon tire of singing hosannas in His train, and want a king with more pretensions; but if we have learned who and what He is to us, then let us open our mouths wide, and not be afraid of letting the world hear our shout of praise.

II. The coming of the King in the temple. The discussion of the accuracy of Matthew's arrangement of events here is unnecessary. He has evidently grouped, as usual, incidents which have a common bearing, and wishes to put these three, of the cleansing, the healing, and the pleasure in the children's praise, as

the characteristic acts of the King in the temple. We can scarcely avoid seeing in the first of the three a reference to Malachi's prophecy, 'The Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to His temple. . . . And He shall purify the sons of Levi.' His first act, when in manhood He visited the temple, had been to cleanse. His first act when He enters it as its Lord is the same. The abuse had grown again apace. Much could be said in its vindication, as convenient and harmless, and it was too profitable to be lightly abandoned. But the altar of Mammon so near the altar of God was sacrilege in His eyes, and though He had passed the traders unmolested many times since that first driving out, now that He solemnly comes to claim His rights, He cannot but repeat it. It is perhaps significant that His words now have both a more sovereign and a more severe tone than before. Then He had spoken of 'My Father's house,' now it is 'My house,' which are a part of His quotation indeed, but not therefore necessarily void of reference to Himself. He is exercising the authority of a son over His own house, and bears Himself as Lord of the temple. Before, He charged them with making it a 'house of merchandise'; now, with turning it into a robber's cave. Evil rebuked and done again is worse than before. Trafficking in things pertaining to the altar is even more likely than other trading to cross the not always very well defined line which separates trade from trickery and commerce from theft. That lesson needs to be laid to heart in many quarters now. There is always a fringe of moneyed interests round Christ's Church, seeking gain out of religious institutions; and their stands have a wonderful tendency to creep inwards from the court of the Gentiles to holier

places. The parasite grows very quickly, and Christ had to deal with it more than once to keep down its growth. The sellers of doves and changers of money into the sacred shekel were venial offenders compared with many in the Church, and the race is not extinct. If Christ were to come to His house to-day, in bodily form, who doubts that He would begin, as He did before, by driving the traders out of His temple? How many 'most respectable' usages and people would have to go, if He did!

The second characteristic, or we might say symbolical, act is the healing of the blind and lame. Royal state and cleansing severity are wonderfully blended with tender pity and the gentle hand of sovereign virtue to heal. The very manifestation of the former drew the needy to Him; and the blind, though they could not see, and the lame, though they could not walk, managed to grope and hobble their way to Him, not afraid of His severity, nor daunted by His royalty. No doubt they haunted the temple precincts as beggars, with perhaps as little sense of its sacredness as the money-changers; but their misery kindled a flicker of confidence and desire, to which He who tends the dimmest wick till it breaks into clear flame could not but respond. Though in His house He casts out the traders, He will heal the cripples and the blind, who know their need, and faintly trust His heart and power. Such a trait could not be wanting in this typical representation of the acts of the King.

Finally, He encourages and casts the shield of His approval round the children's praises. How natural it is that the children, pleased with the stir and not yet drilled into conventionalism, should have kept up their glad shouts, even inside the temple enclosure!

How their fresh treble voices ring yet through all these centuries! The priests had, no doubt, been nursing their wrath at all that had been going on, but they had not dared to interfere with the cleansing, nor, for very shame, with the healings; but now they see their opportunity. This is a clear breach of all propriety, and that is the crime of crimes in the eyes of such people. They had kept quite cool and serenely contemptuous, amid the stir of the glad procession, and they did not much care though He healed some beggars; but to have this unseemly noise, though it was praise, was more than they could stand. Ecclesiastical martinets, and men whose religion is mostly ceremony, are, of course, more 'moved with indignation' at any breach of ceremonial regulations than at holes made in graver laws. Nothing makes men more insensitive to the ring of real worship than being accustomed to the dull decorum of formal worship. Christ answers their 'hearest thou?' with a 'did ye never read?' and shuts their mouths with words so apposite in their plainest meaning that even they are silenced. To Him these young ringing hosannas are 'perfect praise,' and worth any quantity of rabbis' preachments. In their deeper sense, His words declare that the ears of God and of His Son, the Lord of the temple, are more gladly filled with the praises of the 'little ones,' who know their weakness, and hymn His goodness with simple tongue, than with heartless eloquence of words or pomp of worship. The psalm from which the words are taken declares man's superiority over the highest works of God's hands, and the perfecting of the divine praise from his lips. We are but as the little children of creation, but because we know sin and redemption, we lead the chorus of heaven. As St. Bernard says,

‘Something is wanting to the praise of heaven, if those be wanting who can say, “We went through fire and through water; and Thou broughtest us out into a wealthy place.”’ In like manner, those praise Him most acceptably among men who know their feebleness, and with stammering lips humbly try to breathe their love, their need, and their trust.

A NEW KIND OF KING

‘All this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, Tell ye the daughter of Zion, Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass.’—MATT. xxi. 4, 5.

OUR Lord’s entrance into Jerusalem is one of the comparatively few events which are recorded in all the four Gospels. Its singular unlikeness to the rest of His life, and its powerful influence in bringing about the Crucifixion, may account for its prominence in the narratives. It took place probably on the Sunday of Passion Week. Before the palm branches were withered the enthusiasm had died away, and the shouting crowd had found out that this was not the sort of king that they wanted. They might have found that out, even by the very circumstances of the entrance, for they were profoundly significant; though their meaning, like so much of the rest of Christ’s life, was less clear to the partakers and spectators than it is to us. ‘These things understood not the disciples at the first,’ says John in closing his narrative of the entrance, ‘but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that they had done these things unto Him.’

My object in this sermon is not at all to attempt a pictorial treatment of this narrative, for these Gospels

tell it us a great deal better than any of us can tell it after them ; but to seek to bring out, if it may be, two or three aspects of its significance.

I. First, then, I ask you to consider its significance as an altogether exceptional fact in Christ's life.

Throughout the whole of the preceding period, He had had two aims distinctly in view. One was to shun publicity ; and the other was to damp down the heated, vulgar anticipations of the multitude, who expected a temporal king. And now here He deliberately, and of set purpose, takes a step which is like flinging a spark into a powder barrel. The nation was assembled in crowds, full of the unwholesome excitement which attended their meeting for the annual feast. All were in a quiver of expectation ; and knowing that, Jesus Christ originates this scene by His act of sending the two disciples into the village over against them, to 'bring the ass, and the colt the foal of an ass.' The reasons for a course so entirely opposed to all the preceding must have been strong. Let us try to see what they were.

First, He did it in order to precipitate the conflict which was to end in His death. Now, had He any right to do that ? Knowing as He did the ferment of expectation into which He was thrusting this new element of disturbance, and foreseeing, as He must have done, that it would sharpen the hostility of the rulers of the people to a murderous degree, how can He be acquitted of one of two things—either singular shortsightedness or rash foolhardiness in taking such a step ? Was He justified, or was He not ?

If we are to look at His conduct from ordinary points of view, the answer must certainly be that He was not. And we can only understand this, and all the rest of

His actions during the fateful three or four days that followed it, if we recognise in them the fixed resolve of One who knew that His mission was not only to live and to teach by word and life, but to die, and by death to deliver the world. I take it that it is very hard to save the character of Jesus Christ for our reverence if we refuse to regard His death as for our redemption. But if He came, and knew that He came, not only 'to minister' but 'to give His life a ransom for many,' then we can understand how He hastened to the Cross, and deliberately set a light to the train which was to end in that great explosion. On any other hypothesis it seems to me immensely hard to account for His act here.

Then, still further, looking at this distinctly exceptional fact in our Lord's life, we see in it a very emphatic claim to very singular prerogative and position. He not only thereby presented Himself before the nation in their collective capacity as being the King of Israel, but He also did a very strange thing. He dressed Himself, so to speak, in order to fulfil a prophecy. He posed before the world as being the Person who was meant by sacred old words. And His Entrance upon the slow-pacing colt was His voluntary and solemn assertion that He was the Person of whom the whole stream and current of divinely sent premonitions and forecasts had been witnessing from the beginning. He claimed thereby to be the King of Israel and the Fulfiller of the divine promises that were of old.

Now again, I have to ask the question, Was He right, or was He wrong? If He was right, then He is a great deal more than a wise Teacher, and a perfect Example of excellence. If He was wrong, He is a great deal

less. There is no escape from that alternative, as it seems to me, but by the desperate expedient of denying that He ever did this thing which this narrative tells us that He did. At all events I beseech you all, dear friends, to take fairly into your account of the character of Jesus Christ, this fact, that He, the meek, the gentle, said that He *was* meek, and everybody has believed Him; and that once, in the very crisis of His life, and in circumstances which make the act most conspicuous, He who always shunned publicity, nor 'caused His voice to be heard in the streets,' and steadfastly put away from Himself the vulgar homage that would have degraded Him into a mere temporal monarch, did assert that He was the King of Israel and the Fulfiller of prophecy. Ask yourselves, What does that fact mean?

And then, still further, looking at the act as exceptional in our Lord's life, note that it was done in order to make one final, solemn appeal and offer to the men who beheld Him. It was the last bolt in His quiver. All else had failed, perhaps this might succeed. We know not the depths of the mysteries of that divine foreknowledge which, even though it foresees failure, ceases not to plead and to woo obstinate hearts. But this we may thankfully learn, that, just as with despairing hope, but with unremitting energy, Jesus Christ, often rejected, offered Himself once more if perchance He might win men to repentance, so the loving patience and long-suffering of our God cease not to plead ever with us. 'Last of all He sent unto them His Son, saying, They will reverence My Son when they see Him'; and yet the expectation was disappointed, and the Son was slain. We touch deep mysteries, but the persistence of the pleading and

rejected love and pity of our God shine through this strange fact.

II. And now, secondly, let me ask you to note its significance as a symbol.

The prophecy which two out of the four evangelists—viz., Matthew and John—regard as having been, in some sense, fulfilled by the Entrance into Jerusalem, would have been fulfilled quite as truly if there had been no Entrance. For the mere detail of the prophecy is but a picturesque way of setting forth its central and essential point—viz., the meekness of the King. So our Lord's fulfilment is only an external, altogether subsidiary, accomplishment of the prophecy; and in fact, like some other of the external correspondences between His life and the outward details of Old Testament prophecy, is intended for little more than a picture or a signpost which may direct our thoughts to the inward correspondence, which is the true fulfilment.

So then, the deed, like the prophecy after which it is moulded, is wholly and entirely of importance in its symbolical aspect.

The symbolism is clear enough. This is a new kind of King. He comes, not mounted on a warhorse, or thundering across the battlefield in a scythe-armed chariot, like the Pharaohs and the Assyrian monarchs, who have left us their vainglorious monuments, but mounted on the emblem of meekness, patience, gentleness, and peace. And He is a pauper King, for He has to borrow the beast on which He rides, and His throne is draped with the poor, perhaps ragged, robes of a handful of fishermen. And His attendants are not warriors bearing spears, but peasants with palm branches. And the salutation of His royalty is not

the blare of trumpets, but the 'Hosanna!' from a thousand throats. That is not the sort of King that the world calls a King. The Roman soldiers might well have thought they were perpetrating an exquisite jest when they thrust the reed into His unresisting hand, and crushed down the crown of thorns on His bleeding brows.

But the symbol discloses the very secret of His Kingdom, the innermost mysteries of His own character and of the forces to which He intrusts the further progress of His word. Gentleness is royal and omnipotent; force and violence are feeble. The Lord is in the still, small voice, not in the earthquake, nor the fire, nor the mighty wind. The dove's light pinion will fly further than the wings of Rome's eagles, with their strong talons and blood-dyed beaks. And the kingdom that is established in meekness, and rules by gentleness and for gentleness, and has for its only weapons the power of love and the omnipotence of patience, that is the kingdom which shall be eternal and universal.

Now all that is a great deal more than pretty sentiment; it has the closest practical bearing upon our lives. How slow God's Church has been to believe that the strength of Christ's kingdom is meekness! Professing Christian men have sought to win the world to their side, and by wealth or force or persecution, or this, that, or the other of the weapons out of the world's armoury, to promote the kingdom of Christ. But it has all been in vain. There is only one power that conquers hate, and that is meek love. There is only one way by which Christ's kingdom can stand firm, and that is its unworldly contrast to all the manner of human dominion. Wheresoever God's Church has

allied itself with secular sovereignties, and trusted in the arm of flesh, there has the fine gold become dimmed. Endurance wears out persecution, patient submission paralyses hostile violence, for you cannot keep on striking down unresisting crowds with the sword. The Church of Christ is an anvil that has been beaten upon by many hammers, and it has worn them all out. Meekness is victorious, and the kingdom of Christ can only be advanced by the faithful proclamation of His gentle love, from lips that are moved by hearts which themselves are conformed to His patient image.

Then, still further, let me remind you that this symbol carries in it, as it seems to me, the lesson of the radical incompatibility of war with Christ's kingdom and dominion. It has taken the world all these centuries to begin to learn that lesson. But slowly men are coming to it, and the day will dawn when all the pomp of warfare, and the hell of evil passions from which it comes, and which it stimulates, will be felt to be as utterly incompatible with the spirit of Christianity as slavery is felt to-day. The prophecy which underlies our symbol is very significant in this respect. Immediately upon that vision of the meek King throned on the colt the foal of an ass, follows this: 'And I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim, and the horses from Jerusalem; and the battle bow shall be cut off, and He shall speak peace unto the heathen.'

Let me beseech you, Christian men and women, to lay to heart the duty of Christ's followers in reference to the influence and leavening of public opinion upon this matter, and to see to it that, in so far as we can help, we set ourselves steadfastly against that devilish spirit which still oppresses with an incubus almost

intolerable, the nations of so-called Christendom. Lift up your voice, be not afraid, but cry, 'We are the followers of the Prince of Peace, and we war against the war that is blasphemy against His dominion.'

And so, still further, note the practical force of this symbol as influencing our own conduct. We are the followers of the meek Christ. It becomes *us* to walk in all meekness and gentleness. 'Spirited conduct' is the world's euphemism for unchristian conduct, in ninety-nine cases out of the hundred. The perspective of virtue has altered since Jesus Christ taught us how to love. The old heathen virtues of magnanimity, fortitude, and the like have 'with shame to take a lower room.' There is something better than these. The saint has all the virtues of the old heathen hero, and some more besides, which are higher than these, and those which he has in common, he has in different proportion. The flaunting tulips and peonies of the garden of the world seem to outshine the white snow-drops and the glowing, modest little violets below their leaves, but the former are vulgar, and they drop very soon, and the latter, if paler and more delicate, are refined in their celestial beauty. The slow-pacing steed on which Jesus Christ rides will out-travel the fiery warhorse, and will pursue its patient, steadfast path till He 'bring forth righteousness unto judgment,' and 'all the upright in heart shall follow Him.'

III. Lastly, notice the significance of this fact as a prophecy. It was, as I have pointed out, the last solemn appeal to the nation, and in a very real sense it was Christ's coming to judgment. It is impossible to look at it without seeing, besides all its other meanings, gleaming dimly through it, the anticipations of that other coming, when the Lord Himself 'shall

descend with a shout, with the voice of the Archangel, and the trump of God.'

Let me bring into connection with the scene of my text three others, gathered from various parts of Scripture. In the forty-fifth Psalm we find, side by side with the great words, 'Ride on prosperously because of truth and *meekness* and righteousness,' the others, 'Thine arrows are sharp in the hearts of the king's enemies; the people shall fall under Thee.' Now, though it is possible that that later warlike figure may be merely the carrying out of the thought which is more gently put before us in the former words, still it looks as if there were two sides to the conquering manifestation of the king—one being in 'meekness and truth and righteousness,' and the other in some sense destructive and punitive.

But, however that may be, my second scene is drawn from the last book of Scripture, where we read that, when the first seal was opened, there rode forth a Figure, crowned, mounted upon a white steed, bearing bow and arrow, 'conquering and to conquer.' And, though that again may be but an image of the victorious progress of the gentle Gospel of Jesus Christ throughout the whole earth, still it comes as one in a series of judgments, and may rather be taken to express the punitive effects which follow its proclamation even here and now.

But there can be no doubt with regard to the third of the scenes which I connect with the incident of which we are discoursing: 'And I saw heaven opened, and beheld a white horse; and He that sat upon Him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness doth He judge and make war. . . . And out of His mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it He should

smite the nations; and He shall rule them with a rod of iron; and He treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God.' *That* is the Christ who came into Jerusalem on the colt the foal of an ass. *That* is the Christ who is meek and long-suffering. There is a reserve of punitive and destructive power in the meek King. And oh! what can be so terrible as the anger of meekness, the wrath of infinite gentleness? In the triumphal entry, we find that, when the procession turned the rocky shoulder of Olivet, and the long line of the white city walls, with the gilding of the Temple glittering in the sunshine, burst upon their view, the multitude lifted up their voices in gladness. But Christ sat there, and as He looked across the valley, and beheld, with His divine prescience, the city, now so joyous and full of stir, sitting solitary and desolate, He lifted up His voice in loud wailing. The Christ wept because He must punish, but He punished though He wept.

Our Judge is the gentle Jesus, therefore we can hope. The gentle Jesus is our Judge, therefore let us not presume. I beseech you, brethren, lay, as these poor people did their garments, your lusts and proud wills in His way, and join the welcoming shout that hails the King, 'meek and having salvation.' And then, when He comes forth to judge and to destroy, you will not be amongst the ranks of the enemies, whom He will ride down and scatter, but amongst 'the armies that follow Him, . . . clothed in fine linen, clean and pure.'

'Kiss the Son lest He be angry, and ye perish from the way when His wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in Him.'

THE VINEYARD AND ITS KEEPERS

'Hear another parable: There was a certain householder, which planted a vineyard, and hedged it round about, and digged a winepress in it, and built a tower, and let it out to husbandmen, and went into a far country: 34. And when the time of the fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the husbandmen, that they might receive the fruits of it. 35. And the husbandmen took his servants, and beat one, and killed another, and stoned another. 36. Again, he sent other servants more than the first: and they did unto them likewise. 37. But last of all he sent unto them his son, saying, They will reverence my son. 38. But when the husbandmen saw the son, they said among themselves, This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and let us seize on his inheritance. 39. And they caught him, and cast him out of the vineyard, and slew him. 40. When the lord therefore of the vineyard cometh, what will he do unto those husbandmen? 41. They say unto him, He will miserably destroy those wicked men, and will let out his vineyard unto other husbandmen, which shall render him the fruits in their seasons. 42. Jesus saith unto them, Did ye never read in the scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes? 43. Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof. 44. And whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder. 45. And when the chief priests and Pharisees had heard His parables, they perceived that He spake of them. 46. But when they sought to lay hands on Him, they feared the multitude, because they took Him for a prophet.'—**MATT. xxi. 33-46.**

THIS parable was apparently spoken on the Tuesday of the Passion Week. It was a day of hand-to-hand conflict with the Jewish authorities and of exhausting toil, as the bare enumeration of its incidents shows. It included all that Matthew records between verse 20 of this chapter and the end of the twenty-fifth chapter—the answer to the deputation from the Sanhedrin; the three parables occasioned by it, namely, those of the two sons, this one, and that of the marriage of the king's son; the three answers to the traps of the Pharisees and Herodians about the tribute, of the Sadducees about the resurrection, and of the ruler about the chief commandment; Christ's question to His questioners about the Son and Lord of David; the stern woes hurled at the unmasked hypocrites; to which must be added, from other gospels, the sweet eulogium on the widow's mite, and the deep saying to the Greeks about the corn

of wheat, with, possibly, the incident of the woman taken in adultery; and then, following all these, the solemn prophecies of the end contained in Matthew xxiv. and xxv., spoken on the way to Bethany, as the evening shadows were falling. What a day! What a fountain of wisdom and love which poured out such streams! The pungent severity of this parable, with its transparent veil of narrative, is only appreciated by keeping clearly in view the circumstances and the listeners. They had struck at Jesus with their question as to His authority, and He parries the blow. Now it is His turn, and the sharp point goes home.

I. The first stage is the preparation of the vineyard, in which three steps are marked. It is planted and furnished with all appliances needful for making wine, which is its great end. The direct divine origin of the religious ideas and observances of 'Judaism' is thus asserted by Christ. The only explanation of them is that God enclosed that bit of the wilderness, and with His own hands set growing there these exotics. Neither the theology nor the ritual is of man's establishing. We need not seek for special meanings for wall, wine-press, and tower. They simply express the completeness of the equipment of the vineyard, as in Isaiah's song, which lies at the foundation of the parable, and suggest his question, 'What could have been done more?'

Thus furnished, the vineyard is next handed over to the husbandmen, who, in Matthew, are exclusively the rulers, while in Luke they are the people. No doubt it was 'like people, like priest.' The strange dominion of the Pharisees rested entirely on popular consent, and their temper accurately indexed that of the nation. The Sanhedrin was the chief object at

which Christ aimed the parable. But it only gave form and voice to the national spirit, and 'the people loved to have it so.' National responsibilities are not to be slipped out of by being shifted on to the broad shoulders of governments or influential men. Who lets them be governments and influential?

'Guv'ment ain't to answer for it,
God will send the bill to you.'

Christ here teaches both rulers and ruled the ground and purpose of their privileges. They prided themselves on these as their own, but they were only tenants. They made their 'boast of the law'; but they forgot that fruit was the end of the divine planting and equipment. Holiness and glad obedience were what God sought, and when He found them, He was refreshed as with 'grapes in the wilderness.'

Having installed the husbandmen, the owner goes into another country. The cluster of miracles which inaugurate an epoch of revelation are not continued beyond its beginning. Centuries of comparative divine silence followed the planting of the vineyard. Having given us our charge, God, as it were, steps aside to leave us room to work as we will, and so to display what we are made of. He is absent in so far as conspicuous oversight and retribution are concerned. He is present to help, love, and bless. The faithful husbandman has Him always near, a joy and a strength, else no fruit would grow; but the sin and misery of the unfaithful are that they think of Him as far off.

II. Then comes the habitual ill-treatment of the messengers. These are, of course, the prophets, whose office was not only to foretell, but to plead for obedience and trust, the fruits sought by God. The whole

history of the nation is summed up in this dark picture. Generation after generation of princes, priests, and people had done the same thing. There is no more remarkable historical fact than that of the uniform hostility of the Jews to the prophets. That a nation of such a sort as always to hate and generally to murder them should have had them in long succession, throughout its history, is surely inexplicable on any naturalistic hypothesis. Such men were not the natural product of the race, nor of its circumstances, as their fate shows. How did they spring up? No 'philosophy of Jewish history' explains the anomaly except the one stated here,—'He sent His servants.' We are told nowadays that the Jews had a natural genius for religion, just as the Greeks for art and thought, and the Romans for law and order, and that that explains the origin of the prophets. Does it explain their treatment?

The hostility of the husbandmen grows with indulgence. From beating they go on to killing, and stoning is a specially savage form of killing. The opposition which began, as the former parable tells us, with polite hypocrisy and lip obedience, changed, under the stimulus of prophetic appeals, to honest refusal, and from that to violence which did not hesitate to slay. The more God pleads with men, the more self-conscious and bitter becomes their hatred; and the more bitter their hatred, the more does He plead, sending other messengers, more perhaps in number, or possibly of more weight, with larger commission and clearer light. Thus both the antagonistic forces grow, and the worse men become, the louder and more beseeching is the call of God to them. That is always true; and it is also ever true that he who begins with 'I go, sir,'

and goes not, is in a fair way to end with stoning the prophets.

Christ treats the whole long series of violent rejections as the acts of the same set of husbandmen. The class or nation was one, as a stream is one, though all its particles are different; and the Pharisees and scribes, who stood with frowning hatred before Him as He spoke, were the living embodiment of the spirit which had animated all the past. In so far as they inherited their taint, and repeated their conduct, the guilt of all the former generations was laid at their door. They declared themselves their predecessors' heirs; and as they reproduced their actions, they would have to bear the accumulated weight of the consequences.

III. Verses 37-39 tell of the mission of the Son and of its fatal issue. Three points are prominent in them. The first is the unique position which Christ here claims, with unwonted openness and decisiveness, as apart from and far above all the prophets. They constitute one order, but He stands alone, sustaining a closer relation to God. They were faithful 'as servants,' but He 'as a Son,' or, as Mark has it, 'the only and beloved Son.' The listeners understood Him well enough. The assertion, which seemed audacious blasphemy to them, fitted in with all His acts in that last week, which was not only the crisis of His life, but of the nation's fate. Rulers and people must decide whether they will own or reject their King, and they must do it with their eyes open. Jesus claimed to fill a unique position. Was He right or wrong in His claim? If He was wrong, what becomes of His wisdom, His meekness, His religion? Is a religious teacher, who made the mistake of thinking that He was the

Son of God in a sense in which no other man is so, worthy of admiration? If He was right, what becomes of a Christianity which sees in Him only the foremost of the prophets?

The next point marked is the owner's vain hope, in sending his Son. He thought that He would be welcomed, and He was disappointed. It was His last attempt. Christ knew Himself to be God's last appeal, as He is to all men, as well as to that generation. He is the last arrow in God's quiver. When it has shot that bolt, the resources even of divine love are exhausted, and no more can be done for the vineyard than He has done for it. We need not wonder at unfulfilled hopes being here ascribed to God. The startling thought only puts into language the great mystery which besets all His pleadings with men, which are carried on, though they often fail, and which must, therefore, in view of His foreknowledge, be regarded as carried on with the knowledge that they will fail. That is the long-suffering patience of God. The difficulty is common to the words of the parable and to the facts of God's unwearied pleading with impenitent men. Its surface is a difficulty, its heart is an abyss of all-hoping charity.

The last point is the vain calculation of the husbandmen. Christ puts hidden motives into plain words, and reveals to these rulers what they scarcely knew of their own hearts. Did they, in their secret conclaves, look each other in the face, and confess that He was the Heir? Did He not Himself ground His prayer for their pardon on their ignorance? But their ignorance was not entire, else they had had no sin; neither was their knowledge complete, else they had had no pardon. Beneath many an obstinate denial of Him lies a secret

confession, or misgiving, which more truly speaks the man than does the loud negation. And such strange contradictions are men, that the secret conviction is often the very thing which gives bitterness and eagerness to the hostility. So it was with some of those whose hidden suspicions are here set in the light. How was the rulers' or the people's wish to 'seize on His inheritance' their motive for killing Jesus? Their great sin was their desire to have their national prerogatives, and yet to give no true obedience. The ruling class clung to their privileges and forgot their responsibilities, while the people were proud of their standing as Jews, and careless of God's service. Neither wished to be reminded of their debt to the Lord of the vineyard, and their hostility to Jesus was mainly because He would call on them for fruits. If they could get this unwelcome and persistent voice silenced, they could go on in the comfortable old fashion of lip-service and real selfishness. It is an account, in vividly parabolic language, not only of *their* hostility, but of that of many men who are against Him. They wish to possess life and its good, without being for ever pestered with reminders of the terms on which they hold it, and of God's desire for their love and obedience. They have a secret feeling that Christ has the right to ask for their hearts, and so they often turn from Him angrily, and sometimes hate Him.

With what sad calmness does Jesus tell the fate of the son, so certain that it is already as good as done! It *was* done in their counsels, and yet He does not cease to plead, if perchance some hearts may be touched and withdraw themselves from the confederacy of murder.

IV. We have next the self-condemnation from un-

willing lips. Our Lord turns to the rulers with startling and dramatic suddenness, which may have thrown them off their guard, so that their answer leaped out before they had time to think whom it hit. His solemn earnestness laid a spell on them, which drew their own condemnation from them, though they had penetrated the thin veil of the parable, and knew full well who the husbandmen were. Nor could they refuse to answer a question about legal punishments for dishonesty, which was put to them, the fountains of law, without incurring a second time the humiliation just inflicted when He had forced them to acknowledge that they, the fountains of knowledge, did not know where John came from. So from all these motives, and perhaps from a mingling of audacity, which would brazen it out and pretend not to see the bearing of the question, they answer. Like Caiaphas in his counsel, and Pilate with his writing on the Cross, and many another, they spoke deeper things than they knew, and confessed beforehand how just the judgments were, which followed the very lines marked out by their own words.

V. Then come the solemn application and naked truth of the parable. We have no need to dwell on the cycle of prophecies concerning the corner-stone, nor on the original application of the psalm. We must be content with remarking that our Lord, in this last portion of His address, throws away even the thin veil of parable, and speaks the sternest truth in the nakedest words. He puts His own claim in the plainest fashion, as the corner-stone on which the true kingdom of God was to be built. He brands the men who stood before Him as incompetent builders, who did not know the stone needed for their edifice when they saw it. He

declares, with triumphant confidence, the futility of opposition to Himself—even though it kill Him. He is sure that God will build on Him, and that His place in the building, which shall rise through the ages, will be, to even careless eyes, the crown of the manifest wonders of God's hand. Strange words from a Man who knew that in three days He would be crucified! Stranger still that they have come true! He is the foundation of the best part of the best men; the basis of thought, the motive for action, the pattern of life, the ground of hope, for countless individuals; and on Him stands firm the society of His Church, and is hung all the glory of His Father's house.

Christ confirms the sentence just spoken by the rulers on themselves, but with the inversion of its clauses. All disguise is at an end. The fatal 'you' is pronounced. The husbandmen's calculation had been that killing the heir would make them lords of the vineyard; the grim fact was that they cast themselves out when they cast him out. He is the heir. If we desire the inheritance, we must get it through Him, and not kill or reject, but trust and obey Him. The sentence declares the two truths, that possession of the vineyard depends on honouring the Son, and on bringing forth the fruits. The kingdom has been taken from the churches of Asia Minor, Africa, and Syria, because they bore no fruit. It is not held by us on other conditions. Who can venture to speak of the awful doom set forth in the last words here? It has two stages: one a lesser misery, which is the lot of him who stumbles against the stone, while it lies passive to be built on; one more dreadful, when it has acquired motion and comes down with irresistible impetus. To stumble at Christ, or to refuse His grace,

and not to base our lives and hopes on Him, is maiming and damage, in many ways, here and now. But suppose the stone endowed with motion, what can stand against it? And suppose that the Christ, who is now offered for the rock on which we may pile our hopes and never be confounded, comes to judge, will He not crush the mightiest opponent as the dust of the summer threshing-floor?

THE STONE OF STUMBLING

'Whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder.'—MATT. xxi. 44.

As Christ's ministry drew to its close, its severity and its gentleness both increased; its severity to the class to whom it was always severe, and its gentleness to the class from whom it never turned away. Side by side, through all His manifestation of Himself, there were the two aspects: 'He showed Himself *froward*' (if I may quote the word) to the self-righteous and the Pharisee; and He bent with more than a woman's tenderness of yearning love over the darkness and sinfulness, which in its great darkness dimly knew itself blind, and in its sinfulness stretched out a lame hand of faith, and groped after a divine deliverer. Here, in my text, there are only words of severity and awful foreboding. Christ has been telling those Pharisees and priests that the kingdom is to be taken from them, and given to a nation that brings forth the fruits thereof. He interprets for them an Old Testament figure, often recurring, which we read in the 118th Psalm (and I may just say, in passing, that we get here His interpretation of that psalm, and the

vindication of our application of it, and other similar ones, to Him and His office); 'The stone which the builders rejected,' said He, 'is become the head of the corner'; and then, falling back on other Old Testament uses of the same figure, He weaves into one the whole of them—that in Isaiah about the 'sure foundation,' and that in Daniel about 'the stone cut out without hands, which became a great mountain,' crushing down all opposition,—and centres them all in Himself; as fulfilled in Himself, in His person and His work.

The two clauses of my text figuratively point to two different classes of operation on the rejecters of the Gospel. What are these two classes? 'Whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder.' In the one case, the stone is represented as passive, lying quiet; in the other, it has acquired motion. In the one case, the man stumbles and hurts himself; a remediable injury, a self-inflicted injury, a natural injury, without the active operation of Christ to produce it at all; in the other case the injury is worse than remediable, it is utter, absolute, grinding destruction, and it comes from the active operation of the 'stone of stumbling.' That is to say, the one class represents the present hurts and harms which, by the natural operation of things, without the action of Christ judicially at all, every man receives in the very act of rejecting the Gospel; and the other represents the ultimate issue of that rejection, which rejection is darkened into opposition and fixed hostility, when the stone that was laid 'for a foundation' has got wings (if I may so say), and comes down in judgment, crushing and destroying the antagonist utterly. 'Whosoever falls on this stone is broken,' here and now; and 'on whomsoever it

shall fall, it will grind him to powder,' hereafter and yonder.

Taking, then, into account the weaving together in this passage of the three figures from the Old Testament to which I have already referred,—the rejected stone, the foundation, and the mountain-stone of Daniel, and looking in the light of these, at the twofold issues, one present and one future, which the text distinctly brings before us,—we have just three points to which I ask your attention now. First, Every man has some kind of contact with Christ. Secondly, Rejection of Him, here and now, is harm and maiming. And, lastly, Rejection of Him, hereafter and yonder, is hopeless, endless, utter destruction.

I. In the first place, every man has some kind of connection with Christ.

I am not going to enter at all now upon any question about the condition of the 'dark places of the earth' where the Gospel has not come as a well-known preached message; we have nothing to do with that; the principles on which *they* are judged is not the question before us now. I am speaking exclusively about persons who have heard the word of salvation, and are dwelling in the midst of what we call a Christian land. Christ is offered to each of us, in good faith on God's part, as a means of salvation, a foundation on which we may build. A man is free to accept or to reject that offer. If he reject it, he has not thereby cut himself off from all contact and connection with that rejected Saviour, but he still sustains a relation to Him; and the message that he has refused to believe, is exercising an influence upon his character and his destiny.

Christ comes, I say, offered to us all in good faith on

the part of God, as a foundation upon which we may build. And then comes in that strange mystery, that a man, consciously free, turns away from the offered mercy, and makes Him that was intended to be the basis of his life, the foundation of his hope, the rock on which, steadfast and serene, he should build up a temple-home for his soul to dwell in,—makes Him a stumbling-stone against which, by rejection and unbelief, he breaks himself!

My friend, will you let me lay this one thing upon your heart,—you cannot hinder the Gospel from influencing you somehow. Taking it in its lowest aspects, it is one of the forces of modern society, an element in our present civilisation. It is everywhere, it obtrudes itself on you at every turn, the air is saturated with its influence. To be unaffected by such an all-pervading phenomenon is impossible. To no individual member of the great whole of a nation is it given to isolate himself utterly from the community. Whether he oppose or whether he acquiesce in current opinions, to denude himself of the possessions which belong in common to his age and state of society is in either case impracticable. ‘That which cometh into your mind,’ said one of the prophets to the Jews who were trying to cut themselves loose from their national faith and their ancestral prerogatives, ‘That which cometh into your mind shall not be at all, that ye say, We will be as the heathen, as the families of the countries to serve wood and stone.’ Vain dream! You can no more say, I will pass the Gospel by, and it shall be nothing to me, I will simply let it alone, than you can say, I will shut myself up from other influences proper to my time and nation. You cannot go back to the old naked barbarism, and you cannot reduce the

influence of Christianity, even considered merely as one of the characteristics of the times, to zero. You may fancy you are letting it alone, but it does not let you alone; it is here, and you cannot shut yourself off from it.

But it is not merely as a subtle and diffused influence that the Gospel exercises a permanent effect upon us. It is presented to each of us here individually, in the definite form of an actual offer of salvation for each, and of an actual demand of trust from each. The words pass into our souls, and thenceforward we can never be the same as if they had not been there. The smallest ray of light falling on a sensitive plate produces a chemical change that can never be undone again, and the light of Christ's love, once brought to the knowledge and presented for the acceptance of a soul, stamps on it an ineffaceable sign of its having been there. The Gospel once heard, is always the Gospel which has been heard. Nothing can alter that. Once heard, it is henceforward a perpetual element in the whole condition, character, and destiny of the hearer.

Christ does something to every one of us. His Gospel will tell upon you, it *is* telling upon you. If you disbelieve it, you are not the same as if you had never heard it. Never is the box of ointment opened without some savour from it abiding in every nostril to which its odour is wafted. Only the alternative, the awful 'either, or,' is open for each—the 'savour of life unto life, or the savour of death unto death.' To come back to the illustration of the text, Christ is something, and does something to every one of us. He is either the rock on which I build, poor, weak, sinful creature as I am, getting security, and sanctity, and strength

from Him, I being a living stone,' built upon 'the living stone,' and partaking of the vitality of the foundation; or else He is the other thing, 'a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence to them which stumble at the word.' Christ stands for ever in some kind of relation to, and exercises for ever some kind of influence on, every man who has heard the Gospel.

II. The immediate issue of rejection of Him is loss and maiming.

'Whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken.' Just think for a moment, by way of illustrating this principle, first of all, of the *positive* harm which you do to yourself in the act of turning away from the mercy offered you in Christ; and then think for a moment of the *negative* loss which you sustain by the same act.

Note the *positive* harm. Am I uncharitable when I say that no man ever yet *passively neglected* the message of love in God's Son; but that always *this* is the rude outline of the experience of people who know what it is to have a Saviour offered to them, and know what it is to put Him away,—that there is a feeble and transitory movement of heart and will; that Conscience says, 'Thou oughtest'; that Will says, 'I would'; that the heart is touched by some sense of that great and gentle vision of light and love which passes before the eye; that the man, as it were, like some fever-ridden patient, lifts himself up for an instant from the bed on which he is lying, and puts out a hand, and then falls back again, the vacillating, fevered, paralysed will recoiling from the resolution, and the conscience having power to say, 'Thou oughtest,' but no power to enforce the execution of its decrees, and the heart turning away from the salvation that it would have found in the love of love, to the loss that it finds in the

love of self and earth? Or in other words, is it not true that every man who rejects Christ does in simple verity *reject* Him, and not merely neglect Him; that there is always an effort, that there is a struggle, feeble, perhaps, but real, which ends in the turning away? It is not that you stand there, and simply let Him go past. That were bad enough; but the fact is worse than that. It is that you turn your back upon Him. It is not that His hand is laid on yours, and yours remains dead and cold, and does not open to clasp it; but it is that His hand being laid on yours, you clench yours the tighter, and *will not* have it. And so every man (I believe) who rejects Christ does these things thereby—wounds his own conscience, hardens his own heart, makes himself a worse man, just because he has had a glimpse, and has willingly, and almost consciously, ‘loved darkness rather than light.’ Oh, brethren, the message of love can never come into a human soul, and pass away from it unreceived, without leaving that spirit worse, with all its lowest characteristics strengthened, and all its best ones depressed, by the fact of rejection. I have nothing to do now with pursuing that process to its end; but the natural result—if there were no future Judgment at all, if there were no movement ever given to the stone that you ought to build on—the natural result of the simple rejection of the Gospel is that, bit by bit, all the lingering remains of nobleness that hover about the man, like scent about a broken vase, pass away; and that, step by step, through the simple process of saying, ‘I will not have Christ to rule over me,’ the whole being degenerates, until manhood becomes devilhood, and the soul is lost by its own want of faith. Unbelief is its own judgment; unbelief is its own

condemnation; unbelief, as sin, is punished, like all other sins, by the perpetuation of deeper and darker forms of itself. Every time that you stifle a conviction, fight down a conviction, or drive away a conviction; and every time that you feebly move towards the decision, 'I *will* trust Him, and love Him, and be His,' yet fail to realise it, you have harmed your soul, you have made yourself a worse man, you have lowered the tone of your conscience, you have enfeebled your will, you have made your heart harder against love, you have drawn another horny scale over the eye, that will prevent you from seeing the light that is yonder; you have, as much as in you is, withdrawn from God, and approximated to the other pole of the universe (if I may say that), to the dark and deadly antagonist of mercy, and goodness, and truth, and grace. 'Whosoever falls on this stone,' by the natural result of his unbelief, 'shall be broken' and maimed, and shall mar his own nature.

I need not dwell on the *negative* evil results of unbelief; the loss of that which is the only guide for a man, the taking away, or rather the failing to possess, that great love above us, that divine Spirit in us, by which only we are ever made what we ought to be. This only I would leave with you, in this part of my subject, Whoever is not in Christ is maimed. Only he that is 'a man in Christ' has come 'to the measure of the stature of a perfect man.' There, and there alone, do we get the power which will make us full-grown. There alone is the soul planted in that good soil in which, growing, it becomes as a rounded, perfect tree, with leaves and fruits in their season. All other men are half-men, quarter-men, fragments of men, parts of humanity exaggerated and contorted and distorted

from the reconciling whole which the Christian ought to be, and in proportion to his Christianity is on the road to be, and one day will assuredly and actually be, a 'complete and entire man, wanting nothing'; nothing maimed, nothing broken, the realisation of the ideal of humanity, the renewed copy 'of the second Adam, the Lord from heaven.'

There is another consideration closely connected with this second part of my subject, that I just mention and pass on. Not only by the act of rejection of Christ do we harm and maim ourselves, but also all attempts at opposition—formal opposition—to the Gospel as a system, stand self-convicted and self-condemned to speedy decay. What a commentary upon that word, 'Whosoever falls on this stone shall be broken,' is the whole history of the heresies of the Church and the assaults of unbelief! Man after man, rich in gifts, endowed often with far larger and nobler faculties than the people who oppose him, with indomitable perseverance, a martyr to his error, sets himself up against the truth that is sphered in Jesus Christ; and the great divine message simply goes on its way, and all the babblement and noise are like so many bats flying against a light, or like the sea-birds that come sweeping up in the tempest and the night, to the hospitable Pharos that is upon the rock, and smite themselves dead against it. Sceptics well known in their generation, who made people's hearts tremble for the ark of God, what has become of them? Their books lie dusty and undisturbed on the top shelf of libraries; whilst there the Bible stands, with all the scribblings wiped off the page, as though they had never been! Opponents fire their small shot against the great Rock of Ages, and the little pellets

fall flattened, and only scale off a bit of the moss that has gathered there! My brother, let the history of the past teach you and me, with other deeper thoughts, a very calm and triumphant confidence about all that opponents say nowadays; for all the modern opposition to this Gospel will go as all the past has done, and the newest systems which cut and carve at Christianity, will go to the tomb where all the rest have gone; and dead old infidelities will rise up from their thrones, and say to the bran-new ones of this generation, when their day is worked out, 'Are ye also become weak as we? art thou also become like one of us?' 'Whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken': personally, he will be harmed; and his opinions, and his books, and his talk, and all his argumentation, will come to nothing, like the waves that break into impotent foam against the rocky cliffs.

III. Last of all, the issue, the ultimate issue, of unbelief is irremediable destruction when Christ begins to move.

The former clause has spoken about the harm that naturally follows unbelief whilst the Gospel is being preached; the latter clause speaks about the active agency of Christ when the end shall have come, and the preaching of the Gospel shall have merged into the act of judgment. I do not mean to dwell, brethren, upon that thought: it seems to me far too awful a one to be handled by my hands, at any rate. Let us leave it in the vagueness and dreadfulness of the words of Him who never spoke exaggerated words, and who, when He said, 'It shall grind him to powder,' meant (as it seems to me) nothing less than a destruction which, contrasted with the former remediable wounding and breaking, was a destruction utter, and hopeless, and

everlasting, and without remedy. Ground—ground to powder! Any life left in that? any gathering up of that, and making a man of it again? All the humanity battered out of it, and the life clean gone from it! Does not that sound very much like ‘everlasting destruction from the presence of God and from the glory of His power’? Christ, silent now, will begin to speak; passive now, will begin to act. The stone comes down, and the fall of it will be awful. I remember, away up in a lonely Highland valley, where beneath a tall black cliff, all weather-worn, and cracked, and seamed, there lies at the foot, resting on the greensward that creeps round its base, a huge rock, that has fallen from the face of the precipice. A shepherd was passing beneath it; and suddenly, when the finger of God’s will touched it, and rent it from its ancient bed in the everlasting rock, it came down, leaping and bounding from pinnacle to pinnacle—and it fell; and the man that was beneath it is there now! ‘Ground to powder.’ Ah, my brethren, that is not *my* illustration—that is Christ’s. Therefore I say to you, since all that stand against Him shall become ‘as the chaff of the summer threshing-floor,’ and be swept utterly away, make Him the foundation on which you build; and when the storm sweeps away every ‘refuge of lies,’ you will be safe and serene, builded upon the Rock of Ages.

TWO WAYS OF DESPISING GOD’S FEAST

‘And Jesus answered and spake unto them again by parables, and said, 2. The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king, which made a marriage for his son, 3. And sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the wedding; and they would not come. 4. Again, he sent forth other servants, saying, Tell them which are bidden, Behold, I have prepared my dinner: my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready: come unto the marriage. 5. But they made light of it, and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise:

6. And the remnant took his servants, and entreated them spitefully, and slew them. 7. But when the king heard thereof, he was wroth : and he sent forth his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city. 8. Then saith he to his servants, The wedding is ready, but they which were bidden were not worthy. 9. Go ye therefore into the highways, and as many as ye shall find, bid to the marriage. 10. So those servants went out into the highways, and gathered together all as many as they found, both bad and good : and the wedding was furnished with guests. 11. And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding-garment : 12. And he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding-garment? And he was speechless. 13. Then said the king to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness ; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. 14. For many are called, but few are chosen.'—MATT. xxii. 1-14.

THIS parable, and the preceding one of the vine-dressers, make a pair. They are closely connected in time, as well as subject. 'Jesus answered.' What? Obviously, the unspoken murderous hate, restrained by fear, which had been raised in the rulers' minds, and flashed in their eyes, and moved in their gestures. Christ answers it by repeating His blow; for the present parable is, in outline, identical with the preceding, though differing in colouring, and carrying its thoughts farther. That stopped with the transference of the kingdom to the Gentiles; this passes on to speak also of the development among the Gentiles, and ends with the law 'many called, few chosen,' which is exemplified in Jew and Gentile. There are, then, two parts in it: verses 1-9 covering the same ground as the former; verses 10-14 adding new matter.

I. The judgment on those who refuse the offered joys of the kingdom. In the previous parable, the kingdom was presented on the side of duty and service. The call was to render obedience. The vineyard was a sphere for toil. The owner had given it indeed, but, having given, he required. That is only half the truth, and the least joyful half. So this parable dismisses all ideas of work, duty, service, requirement, and instead gives the emblem of a marriage feast as the picture of the kingdom. It therein unites two familiar prophetic

images for the Messianic times—those of a festival and of a marriage. As Luther says, ‘He calls it a marriage feast, not a time of toil or a time of sorrow, but a time of holiday and a time of joy; in which we make ourselves fine, sing, play, dance, eat, drink, are glad, and have a good time; else it would not be a wedding feast, if people were to be working, mourning, or crying. Therefore, Christ calls His Christianity and gospel by the name of the highest joy on earth; namely, by the name of a marriage feast.’ How pathetic this designation of His kingdom is on Christ’s lips, when we remember how near His bitter agony He stood, and that He tasted its bitterness already! It is not the whole truth any more than the vineyard emblem is. Both must be united in our idea of the kingdom, as both may be in experience. It is possible to be at once toiling among the vines in the hot sunshine, and feasting at the table. The Christian life is not all grinding at heavy tasks, nor all enjoyment of spiritual refreshment; but our work may be so done as to be our ‘meat’—as it was His—and our glad repose may be unbroken even in the midst of toil. We are, at one and the same time, labourers in the king’s vineyard, and guests at the king’s table; and the same duality will, in some unknown fashion, continue in the perfect kingdom, where there will be both work and feasting, and all the life shall be both in one.

The second point to be noticed is the invitations of the king. There had been an invitation before the point at which the parable begins, for the servants are sent to summon those who had already been ‘called.’ That calling, which lies beyond the horizon of our parable, is the whole series of agencies in Old Testament times. So this parable begins almost where the former

leaves off. They only slightly overlap. The first servants here are Christ Himself, and His followers in their ministry during His life; and the second set are the apostles and preachers of the gospel during the period between the completion of the preparation of the feast (that is, the death of Christ) and the destruction of Jerusalem. The characteristic difference of their message from that of the servants in the former parable, embodies the whole difference between the preaching of the prophets, as messengers demanding the fruit of righteousness, and the glad tidings of a gospel of free grace which does not demand, but offers, and does not say 'obey' until it has said 'eat, and be glad.' The reiterated invitations not only correspond to the actual facts, but, like the facts, set the miracle of God's patience in a still brighter light than the former story did; for while it is wonderful that the lord of the vineyard should stoop to ask so often for fruit, it is far more wonderful that the founder of the feast, who is king too, should stoop to offer over and over again the refused abundance of his table.

Mark, further, the refusal of the invitations: 'They would not (or "did not wish to") come.' That is Christ's gentle way of describing the unbelief of His generation. It is the second set of refusers who are painted in darker colours. We are accustomed to think that the sin of His contemporaries was great beyond parallel, but he seems here to hint that the sin of those who reject Him after the Cross and the Resurrection, is blacker than theirs. At any rate, it clearly is so. But note that the parable speaks as if the refusers were the same persons throughout, thus taking the same point of view as the former one did, and regarding the generations of the Jews as one whole. There is a real

unity, though the individuals be different, if the spirit actuating successive generations be the same.

Note the two classes of rejecters. The first simply pay no attention, because their heads are full of business. They do not even speak more or less lame excuses, as the refusers in Luke's similar parable had the decency to do. The king's messenger addresses a group, who pause on their road for a moment, to listen listlessly to what he has to say, and, when he has done, disperse without a word, each man going on his road, as if nothing had happened. The ground of their indifference lies in their absorption with this world's good, and their belief that it is best. 'His own farm,' as the original puts it emphatically, holds one man by the solid delight of possessing acres that he can walk over and till; his merchandise draws another, by the excitement of speculation and the lust of acquiring. It is not only the hurry and fever of a great commercial city, but the quiet and leisure of country life, which shut out taste for God's feast. Strange preference of toil and risk of loss to abundance, repose, and joy! Savages barter gold for glass beads. We choose lives of weary work and hunting after uncertain riches, rather than listen to His call, despising the open-handed housekeeping of our Father's house, and trying to fill our hunger with the swine's husks. The suicidal madness of refusing the kingdom is set in a vivid light in these quiet words.

But stranger still is the conduct of the rest. Why should they kill men whose only fault was bringing them a hospitable invitation? The incongruity of the representation has given offence to some interpreters, who are not slow to point out how Christ could have improved His parable. But the reality is more incongruous still, and the unmotivated outburst of wrath

against the innocent bearers of a kindly invitation is only too true to life. Mark the distinction drawn by our Lord between the bulk of the people who simply neglected, and the few who violently opposed. He does not charge the guilt on all. The murderers of Him and of His first followers were not the mass of the nation, who, left to themselves, would not have so acted, but the few who stirred up the many. But, though He does not lay the guilt at the doors of all, yet the punishment falls on all, and, when the city is burned, the houses of the negligent and of the slayers are equally consumed; for simple refusal of the message and slaying the messengers were but the positive and superlative degrees of the same crime—rebellion against the king, whose invitation was a command.

The fatal issue is presented, as in the former parable, in two parts: the destruction of the rebels, and the passing over of the kingdom to others. But the differences are noteworthy. Here we read that 'the king was wroth.' Insult to a king is worse than dishonesty to a landlord. The refusal of God's proffered grace is even more certain to awake that awful reality, the wrath of God, than the failure to render the fruits of the good possessed. Love repelled and thrown back on itself cannot but become wrath. That refusal, which is rebellion, is fittingly described as punished by force of arms and the burning of the city. We can scarcely help seeing that our Lord here, in a very striking and unusual way, mingles prose prediction with parabolic imagery. Some commentators object to this, and take the armies and the burning to be only part of the imagery, but it is difficult to believe that. Note the forcible pronouns, 'His armies,' and 'their city.' The terrible Roman legions were His soldiers for the time

being, the axe which He laid to the root of the tree. The city had ceased to be His, just as the temple ceased to be 'My house,' and became, by their sin, 'your house.' The legend told that, before their destruction, a mighty voice was heard saying, 'Let us depart,' and, with the sound of rushing wings, His presence left sanctuary and city. When He was no longer 'the glory in the midst,' He was no longer 'a wall of fire round about,' and the Roman torches worked their will on the city which was no longer 'the city of our God.'

The command to gather in others to fill the vacant places follows on the destruction of the city. This may seem to be opposed to the facts of the transference of the kingdom to the Gentiles, which certainly was begun long before Jerusalem fell. But its fall was the final and complete severance of Christianity from Judaism, and not till then had the messengers to give up the summons to Israel as hopeless. Perhaps Paul had this parable floating in his memory when he said to the howling blasphemers at Antioch in Pisidia, 'Seeing ye . . . judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles. For so hath the Lord commanded us.' 'They which were bidden were not worthy,' and their unworthiness consisted not in any other moral demerit, but solely in this, that they had refused the proffered blessings. That is the only thing which makes any of us unworthy. And that will make the best of us unworthy.

II. Verses 10-14 carry us beyond the preceding parable, and show us the judgment on the unworthy accepters of the invitation. There are two ways of sinning against God's merciful gift: the one is refusing to accept it; the other is taking it in outward seeming, but continuing in sin. The former was the sin of the

Jews; the latter is the sin of nominal Christians. We may briefly note the points of this appendix to the parable. The first is the indiscriminate invitation, which is more emphatically marked as being so, by the mention of the 'bad' before the good among the guests. God's offer is for all, and, in a very real sense, is specially sent to the worst, just as the doctor goes first to the most severely wounded. So the motley crew, without the least attempt at discrimination, are seated at the table. If the Church understands its business, it will have nothing to do in its message with distinctions of character any more than of class, but, if it makes any difference, will give the outcast and disreputable the first place in its efforts. Is that what it does?

The next point is the king's inspection. The word rendered 'behold' implies a fixed and minute observation. When does that scrutiny take place? Obviously, from the sequel, the final judgment is referred to, and it is remarkable that here there is no mention of the king's son as the judge. No parable can shadow forth all truth, and though the Father 'has committed all judgment to the Son,' the Son's judgment is the Father's, and the exigencies of the parable required that the son as bridegroom should not be brought into view as judge. Note that there is only one guest without the dress needed. That may be an instance of the lenity of Christ's charity, which hopeth all things; or it may rather be intended to suggest the keenness of the king's glance, which, in all the crowded tables, picks out the one ragged losel who had found his way there—so individual is his knowledge, so impossible for us to hide in the crowd.

Mark that the feast has not begun, though the guests

are seated. The judgment stands at the threshold of the heavenly kingdom. The king speaks with a certain coldness, very unlike the welcome fit for a guest; and his question is one of astonishment at the rude boldness of the man who came there, knowing that he had not the proper dress. (That knowledge is implied in the form of the sentence in the Greek.) What, then, is the wedding garment? It can be nothing else than righteousness, moral purity, which fits for sitting at His table in His kingdom. And the man who has it not, is the nominal Christian, who says that he has accepted God's invitation, and lives in sin, not putting off 'the old man with his deeds,' nor putting on 'the new man, which is created in righteousness.' How that garment was to be obtained is no part of this parable. We know that it is only to be received by faith in Jesus Christ, and that if we are to pass the scrutiny of the king, it must be as 'not having our own righteousness,' but His made ours by faith which makes us righteous, and then by all holy effort, and toil in His strength, we must clothe our souls in the dress which befits the banqueting hall; for only they who are washed and clothed in fine linen, clean and white, shall sit there. But Christ's purpose here was not to explain how the robe was to be procured, but to insist that it must be worn.

'He was speechless,'—or, as the word means, 'muzzled.' The man is self-condemned, and, having nothing to say in extenuation, the solemn promise is pronounced of ejection from the lighted hall, with limbs bound so that he cannot struggle, and consignment to the blackness outside, of which our Lord adds, in words not put into the king's mouth, but which we have heard from Him before, 'There shall be the [well-known and terrible] weeping and gnashing of teeth

—awful though figurative expressions for despair and passion.

Both parts of the parable come under one law, and exemplify one principle of the kingdom, that its invitations extend more widely than the real possession of its gifts. The unbelieving Jew, in one direction, and the unrighteous Christian in another, are instances of this.

This is not the place to discuss that wide and well-worn question of the ground of God's choice. That does not enter into the scope of the parable. For it, the choice is proved by the actual participation in the feast. They who do not choose to receive the invitation, or to put on the wedding garment, do, in different ways, show that they are not 'chosen' though 'called.' The lesson is, not of interminable and insoluble questionings about God's secrets, but of earnest heed to His gracious call, and earnest, believing effort to make the fair garment our very own, 'if so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked.'

THE TABLES TURNED: THE QUESTIONERS QUESTIONED

'But when the Pharisees had heard that He had put the Sadducees to silence, they were gathered together. 35. Then one of them, which was a lawyer, asked Him a question, tempting Him, and saying, 36. Master, which is the great commandment in the law? 37. Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. 38. This is the first and great commandment. 39. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. 40. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets. 41. While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, 42. Saying, What think ye of Christ? whose Son is He? They say unto Him, The son of David. 43. He saith unto them, How then doth David in spirit call Him Lord, saying, 44. The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit Thou on My right hand, till I make Thine enemies Thy footstool? 45. If David then call Him Lord, how is He his son? 46. And no man was able to answer Him a word; neither durst any man, from that day forth, ask Him any more questions.'—MATT. xxii. 34-46.

HERODIANS, Sadducees, Pharisees, who were at daggers drawn with each other, patched up an alliance against

Jesus, whom they all hated. Their questions were cunningly contrived to entangle Him in the cobwebs of casuistry and theological hair-splitting, but He walked through the fine-spun snares as a lion might stalk away with the nooses set for him dangling behind him. The last of the three questions put to Jesus, and the one question with which He turned the tables and silenced His questioners, are our subject. In the former, Jesus declares the essence of the law or of religion; in the latter, He brings to light the essential loftiness of the Messiah.

I. The two preceding questions are represented to have been asked by deputations; this is specially noted as emanating from an individual. The 'lawyer' seems to have anticipated his colleagues, and possibly his question was not that which they had meant to put. His motive in asking it was that of 'tempting' Jesus, but we must not give that word too hostile a sense, for it may mean no more than 'testing' or trying. The legal expert wished to find out the attainments and standpoint of this would-be teacher, and so he proposed a question which would bring out the whereabouts of Jesus, and give opportunity for a theological wrangle. He did not ask the question for guidance, but as an inquisitor cross-examining a suspected heretic. Probably the question was a stereotyped one, and there are traces in the Gospels that the answer recognised as orthodox was that which Jesus gave (Luke x. 27). The two commandments are quoted from Deuteronomy vi. 5 and Leviticus xix. 18 respectively. The lawyer probably only desired to raise a discussion as to the relative worth of isolated precepts. Jesus goes deep down below isolated precepts, and unifies, as well as transforms, the law. Supreme and

undivided love to God is not only the great, but also the first, commandment. In more modern phrase, it is the sum of man's duty and the germ of all goodness. Note that Jesus shifts the centre from conduct to character, from deeds to affections. 'As a man *thinketh* in his heart, so is he,' said the sage of old; Christ says, 'As a man loves, so is he.' Two loves we have,—either the dark love of self and sense, or the white love of God, and all character and conduct are determined by which of these sways us. Note, further, that love to God must needs be undivided. God is one and all; man is one and finite. To love such an object with half a heart is not to love. True, our weakness leads astray, but the only real love corresponding to the natures of the lover and the loved is whole-hearted, whole-souled, whole-minded. It must be 'all in all, or not at all.'

'A second is like unto it,'—love to man is the under side, as it were, of love to God. The two commandments are alike, for both call for love, and the second is second because it is a consequence of the first. Each sets up a lofty standard; 'with all thy heart' and 'as thyself' sound equally impossible, but both result necessarily from the nature of the case. Religion is the parent of all morality, and especially of benevolent love to men. Innate self-regard will yield to no force but that of love to God. It is vain to try to create brotherhood among men unless the sense of God's fatherhood is its foundation. Love of neighbours is the second commandment, and to make it the first, as some do now, is to end all hope of fulfilling it. Still further, Jesus hangs law and prophets on these two precepts, which, at bottom, are one. Not only will all other duties be done in doing these, since 'love is the fulfilling of the

law,' but all other precepts, and all the prophets' appeals and exhortations, are but deductions from, or helps to the attainment of, these. All our forms of worship, creeds, and the like, are of worth in so far as they are outcomes of love to God, or aid us in loving Him and our neighbours. Without love, they are 'as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.'

II. The Pharisees remained 'gathered together,' and may have been preparing another question, but Jesus had been long enough interrogated. It was not fitting that He should be catechised only. His questions teach. He does not seek to 'entangle' the Pharisees 'in their speech,' nor to make them contradict themselves, but brings them full up against a difficulty, that they may open their eyes to the great truth which is its only solution. His first question, 'What think ye of the Christ?' is simply preparatory to the second. The answer which He anticipated was given,—as, of course, it would be, for the Davidic descent of the Messiah was a commonplace universally accepted. One can fancy that the Pharisees smiled complacently at the attempt to puzzle them with such an elementary question, but the smile vanished when the next one came. They interpreted Psalm 110 as Messianic, and David in it called Messiah 'my Lord.' How can He be both? Jesus' question is in two forms,—'If He is son, how does David call Him Lord?' or, if He is Lord, 'how then is He his son?' Take either designation, and the other lands you in inextricable difficulties.

Now what was our Lord's purpose in thus driving the Pharisees into a corner? Not merely to 'muzzle' them, as the word in verse 34, rendered 'put to silence,' literally means, but to bring to light the inadequate conceptions of the Messiah and of the nature of His

kingdom, to which exclusive recognition of his Davidic descent necessarily led. David's son would be but a king after the type of the Herods and Cæsars, and his kingdom as 'carnal' as the wildest zealot expected, but David's Lord, sitting at God's right hand, and having His foes made His footstool by Jehovah Himself,—what sort of a Messiah King would that be? The majestic image, that shapes itself dimly here, was a revelation that took the Pharisees' breath away, and made them dumb. Nor are the words without a half-disclosed claim on Christ's part to be that which He was so soon to avow Himself before the high priest as being. The first hearers of them probably caught that meaning partly, and were horrified; we hear it clearly in the words, and answer, 'Thou art the King of glory, O Christ! Thou art the everlasting Son of the Father.'

Jesus here says that Psalm 110 is Messianic, that David was the author, and that he wrote it by divine inspiration. The present writer cannot see how our Lord's argument can be saved from collapse if the psalm is not David's.

THE KING'S FAREWELL

'Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness. 28. Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity. 29. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because ye build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the sepulchres of the righteous, 30. And say, If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets. 31. Wherefore ye be witnesses unto yourselves, that ye are the children of them which killed the prophets. 32. Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers. 33. Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell? 34. Wherefore, behold, I send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes: and some of them ye shall kill and crucify; and some of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues, and persecute them from city to city: 35. That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of

righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar. 36. Verily I say unto you, All these things shall come upon this generation. 37. O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! 38. Behold, your house is left unto you desolate. 39. For I say unto you, Ye shall not see Me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord.'—*MATT. xxiii. 27-39.*

IF, with the majority of authorities, we exclude verse 14 from the text, there are, in this chapter, seven woes, like seven thunders, launched against the rulers. They are scathing exposures, but, as the very word implies, full of sorrow as well as severity. They are not denunciations, but prophecies warning that the end of such tempers must be mournful. The wailing of an infinite compassion, rather than the accents of anger, sounds in them; and it alone is heard in the outburst of lamenting in which Christ's heart runs over, as in a passion of tears, at the close. The blending of sternness and pity, each perfect, is the characteristic of this wonderful climax of our Lord's appeals to His nation. Could such tones of love and righteous anger joined have been sent echoing through the ages in this Gospel, if they had not been heard?

I. The woe of the 'whited sepulchres.' The first four woes are directed mainly to the teachings of the scribes and Pharisees; the last three to their characters. The two first of these fasten on the same sin, of hypocritical holiness. There is, however, a difference between the representation of hypocrites under the metaphor of the clean outside of the cup and platter, and that of the whited sepulchre. In the former, the hidden sin is 'extortion and excess'; that is, sensual enjoyment wrongly procured, of which the emblems of cup and plate suggest that good eating and drinking are a chief part. In the latter, it is 'iniquity'—a more general and darker name for sin. In the former, the

Pharisee is 'blind,' self-deceived in part or altogether; in the latter, stress is rather laid on his 'appearance unto men.' The repetition of the same charge in the two woes teaches us Christ's estimate of the gravity and frequency of the sin.

The whitened tombs of Mohammedan saints still gleam in the strong sunlight on many a knoll in Palestine. If the Talmudical practice is as old as our Lord's time, the annual whitewashing was lately over. Its purpose was not to adorn the tombs, but to make them conspicuous, so that they might be avoided for fear of defilement. So He would say, with terrible irony, that the apparent holiness of the rulers was really a sign of corruption, and a warning to keep away from them. What a blow at their self-complacency! And how profoundly true it is that the more punctiliously white the hypocrite's outside, the more foul is he within, and the wider berth will all discerning people give him! The terrible force of the figure needs no dwelling on. In Christ's estimate, such a soul was the very dwelling-place of death; and foul odours and worms and corruption filled its sickening recesses. Terrible words to come from His lips into which grace was poured, and bold words to be flashed at listeners who held the life of the Speaker in their hands! There are two sorts of hypocrites, the conscious and the unconscious; and there are ten of the latter for one of the former, and each ten times more dangerous. Established religion breeds them, and they are specially likely to be found among those whose business is to study the documents in which it is embodied. These woes are not like thunder-peals rolling above our heads, while the lightning strikes the earth miles away. A religion which is mostly

whitewash is as common among us as ever it was in Jerusalem; and its foul accompaniments of corruption becoming more rotten every year, as the whitewash is laid on thicker, may be smelt among us, and its fatal end is as sure.

II. The woe of the sepulchre builders (vs. 29-36). In these verses we have, first, the specification of another form of hypocrisy, consisting in building the prophets' tombs, and disavowing the fathers' murder of them. Honouring dead prophets was right; but honouring dead ones and killing living ones was conscious or unconscious hypocrisy. The temper of mind which leads to glorifying the dead witnesses, also leads to supposing that all truth was given by them; and hence that the living teachers, who carry their message farther, are false prophets. A generation which was ready to kill Jesus in honour of Moses, would have killed Moses in honour of Abraham, and would not have had the faintest apprehension of the message of either.

It is a great deal easier to build tombs than to accept teachings, and a good deal of the posthumous honour paid to God's messengers means, 'It's a good thing they are dead, and that we have nothing to do but to put up a monument.' Bi-centenaries and ter-centenaries and jubilees do not always imply either the understanding or the acceptance of the principles supposed to be glorified thereby. But the magnifiers of the past are often quite unconscious of the hollowness of their admiration, and honest in their horror of their fathers' acts; and we all need the probe of such words as Christ's to pierce the skin of our lazy reverence for our fathers' prophets, and let out the foul matter below—namely, our own blindness to God's messengers of to-day.

The statement of the hypocrisy is followed, in verses 31-33, with its unmasking and condemnation. The words glow with righteous wrath at white heat, and end in a burst of indignation, most unfamiliar to His lips. Three sentences, like triple lightning, flash from His pained heart. With almost scornful subtlety He lays hold of the words which He puts into the Pharisees' mouths, to convict them of kindred with those whose deeds they would disown. 'Our fathers, say you? Then you do belong to the same family, after all. You confess that you have their blood in your veins; and, in the very act of denying sympathy with their conduct, you own kindred. And, for all your protestations, spiritual kindred goes with bodily descent.' Christ here recognises that children probably 'take after their parents,' or, in modern scientific terms, that 'heredity' is the law, and that it works more surely in the transmission of evil than of good.

Then come the awful words bidding that generation 'fill up the measure of the fathers.' They are like the other command to Judas to do his work quickly. They are more than permission, they are command; but such a command as, by its laying bare of the true character of the deed in view, is love's last effort at prevention. Mark the growing emotion of the language. Mark the conception of a nation's sins as one through successive generations, and the other, of these as having a definite measure, which being filled, judgment can no longer tarry. Generation after generation pours its contributions into the vessel, and when the last black drop which it can hold has been added, then comes the catastrophe. Mark the fatal necessity by which inherited sin becomes darker sin. The fathers' crimes are less than the sons'. This inherit-

ance increases by each transmission. The clock strikes one more at each revolution of the hands.

It is hard to recognise Christ in the terrible words that follow. We have heard part of them from John the Baptist; and it sounded natural for him to call men serpents and the children of serpents, but it is somewhat of a shock to hear Jesus hurling such names at even the most sinful. But let us remember that He who sees hearts, has a right to tell harsh truths, and that it is truest kindness to strip off masks which hide from men their own real character, and that the revelation of the divine love in Jesus would be a partial and impotent revelation if it did not show us the righteous love which is wrath. There is nothing so terrible as the anger of gentle compassion, and the fiercest and most destructive wrath is 'the wrath of the Lamb.' Seldom, indeed, did He show that side of His character; but it is there, and the other side would not be so blessed as it is, unless that were there too.

The woe ends with the double prophecy that that generation would repeat and surpass the fathers' guilt, and that on it would fall the accumulated penalties of past bloodshed. Note that solemn 'therefore,' which looks back to the whole preceding context, and forward to the whole subsequent. Because the rulers professed abhorrence of their fathers' deeds, and yet inherited their spirit, they too would have their prophets, and would slay them. God goes on sending His messengers, because we reject them; and the more deaf men are, the more does He peal His words into their ears. That is mercy and compassion, that all men may be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth; but it is judgment too, and its foreseen effect

must be regarded as part of the divine purpose in it. Christ's desire is one thing, His purpose another. His desire is that all should find in His gospel 'the savour of life'; but His purpose is that, if it be not that to any, it shall be to them the savour of death. Mark, too, the authority with which He, in the face of these scowling Pharisees, assumes the distinct divine prerogative of sending forth inspired men, who, as His messengers, shall stand on a level with the prophets of old. Mark His silence as to His own fate, which is only obscurely hinted at in the command to fill up the measure of the fathers. Observe the detailed enumeration of His messengers' gifts,—'prophets' under direct inspiration, like those of old, which may especially refer to the apostles; 'wise men,' like a Stephen or an Apollos; 'scribes,' such as Mark and Luke and many a faithful servant since, whose pen has loved to write the name above every name. Note the detailed prophecy of their treatment, which begins with *slaying* and goes down to the less severe *scourging*, and thence to the milder *persecution*. Do the three punishments belong to the three classes of messengers, the severest falling to the lot of the most highly endowed, and even the quiet penman being hunted from city to city?

We need not wriggle and twist to try to avoid admitting that the calling of the martyred Zacharias, 'the son of Barachias,' is an error of some one who confused the author of the prophetic book with the person whose murder is narrated in 2 Chronicles xxiv. We do not know who made the mistake, or how it appears in our text, but it is not honest to try to slur it over. The punishment of long ages of sin, carried on from father to son, does in the course of that history of the world, which is a part of the judgment of the world,

fall upon one generation. It takes long for the mass of heaped-up sin to become top-heavy; but when it is so, it buries one generation of those who have worked at piling it up, beneath its down-rushing avalanche.

‘The mills of God grind slowly,
But they grind exceeding small.’

The catastrophes of national histories are prepared for by continuous centuries. The generation that laid the first powder-hornful of the train is dead and buried, long before the explosion which sends constituted order and institutions sky-high. The misery is that often the generation which has to pay the penalty has begun to awake to the sin, and would be glad to mend it, if it could. England in the seventeenth century, France in the eighteenth, America in the nineteenth, had to reap harvests from sins sown long before. Such is the law of the judgment wrought out by God’s providence in history. But there is another judgment, begun here and perfected hereafter, in which fathers and sons shall each bear their own burden, and reap accurately the fruit of what they have sown. ‘The soul that sinneth, it shall die.’

III. The parting wail of rejected love. The lightning flashes of the sevenfold woes end in a rain of pity and tears. His full heart overflows in that sad cry of lamentation over the long-continued foiling of the efforts of a love that would fain have fondled and defended. What intensity of feeling is in the redoubled naming of the city! How yearningly and wistfully He calls, as if He might still win the faithless one, and how lingeringly unwilling He is to give up hope! How mournfully, rather than accusingly, He reiterates the acts which had run through the whole

history, using a form of the verbs which suggests continuance. Mark, too, the matter-of-course way in which Christ assumes that He sent all the prophets whom, through the generations, Jerusalem had stoned.

So the lament passes into the solemn final leave-taking, with which our Lord closes His ministry among the Jews, and departs from the temple. As, in the parable of the marriage-feast, the city was emphatically called 'their city,' so here the Temple, in whose courts He was standing, and which in a moment He was to quit for ever, is called 'your house,' because His departure is the withdrawing of the true Shechinah. It had been the house of God: now He casts it off, and leaves it to them to do as they will with it. The saddest punishment of long-continued rejection of His pleading love, is that it ceases at last to plead. The bitterest woe for those who refuse to render to Him the fruits of the vineyard, is to get the vineyard for their own, undisturbed. Christ's utmost retribution for obstinate blindness is to withdraw from our sight. All the woes that were yet to fall, in long, dreary succession on that nation, so long continued in its sin, so long continued in its misery, were hidden in that solemn departure of Christ from the henceforward empty temple. Let us fear lest our unfaithfulness meet the like penalty! But even the departure does not end His yearnings, nor close the long story of the conflict between God's beseeching love and their unbelief. The time shall come when the nation shall once more lift up, with deeper, truer adoration, the hosannas of the triumphal entry. And then a believing Israel shall see their King, and serve Him. Christ never takes final leave of any man in this world. It is ever possible that dumb lips may be opened to welcome

Him, though long rejected; and His withdrawals are His efforts to bring about that opening. When it takes place, how gladly does He return to the heart which is now His temple, and unveil His beauty to the long-darkened eyes!

TWO FORMS OF ONE SAYING

'He that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved.'—MATT. xxiv. 13, R.V.

'In your patience possess ye your souls.'—LUKE xxi. 19.

THESE two sayings, different as they sound in our Version, are probably divergent representations of one original. The reasons for so supposing are manifold and obvious on a little consideration. In the first place, the two sayings occur in the Evangelists' reports of the same prophecy and at the same point therein. In the second place, the verbal resemblance is much greater than appears in our Authorised Version, because the word rendered 'patience' in Luke is derived from that translated 'endureth' in Matthew; and the true connection between the two versions of the saying would have been more obvious if we had had a similar word in both, reading in the one 'he that endureth,' and in the other 'in your endurance.' In the third place, the difference between these two sayings presented in our Version, in that the one is a promise and the other a command, is due to an incorrect reading of St. Luke's words. The Revised Version substitutes for the imperative 'possess' the promise 'ye shall possess,' and with that variation the two sayings are brought a good deal nearer each other. In both endurance is laid down as the condition, which in both is followed by a promise. Then, finally, there

need be no difficulty in seeing that 'possessing,' or, more literally, 'gaining your souls,' is an exact equivalent of the other expression, 'ye shall be saved.' One cannot but remember our Lord's solemn antithetical phrase about a man 'losing his own soul.' To 'win one's soul' is to be saved; to be saved is to win one's soul.

So I think I have made out my thesis that the two sayings are substantially one. They carry a great weight of warning, of exhortation, and of encouragement to us all. Let us try now to reap some of that harvest.

I. First, then, notice the view of our condition which underlies these sayings.

It is a sad and a somewhat stern one, but it is one to which, I think, most men's hearts will respond, if they give themselves leisure to think; and if they 'see life steadily, and see it whole.' For howsoever many days are bright, and howsoever all days are good, yet, on the whole, 'man is a soldier, and life is a fight.' For some of us it is simple endurance; for all of us it has sometimes been agony; for all of us, always, it presents resistance to every kind of high and noble career, and especially to the Christian one. Easy-going optimists try to skim over these facts, but they are not to be so lightly set aside. You have only to look at the faces that you meet in the street to be very sure that it is always a grave and sometimes a bitter thing to live. And so our two texts presuppose that life on the whole demands endurance, whatever may be included in that great word.

Think of the inward resistance and outward hindrances to every lofty life. The scholar, the man of culture, the philanthropist—all who would live for

anything else than the present, the low, and the sensual—find that there is a banded conspiracy, as it were, against them, and that they have to fight their way by continual antagonism, by continual persistence, as well as by continual endurance. Within, weakness, torpor, weariness, levity, inconstant wills, bright purposes clouding over, and all the cowardice and animalism of our nature war continually against the better, higher self. And without, there is a down-dragging, as persistent as the force of gravity, coming from the whole assemblage of external things that solicit, and would fain seduce us. The old legends used to tell us how, whensoever a knight set out upon any great and lofty quest, his path was beset on either side by voices, sometimes whispering seductions, and sometimes shrieking maledictions, but always seeking to withdraw him from his resolute march onwards to his goal. And every one of us, if we have taken on us the orders of any lofty chivalry, and especially if we have sworn ourselves knights of the Cross, have to meet the same antagonism. Then, too, there are golden apples rolled upon our path, seeking to draw us away from our steadfast endurance.

Besides the hindrances in every noble path, the hindrances within and the hindrances without, the weight of self and the drawing of earth, there come to us all—in various degrees no doubt, and in various shapes—but to all of us there come the burdens of sorrows and cares, and anxieties and trials. Wherever two or three are gathered together, even if they gather for a feast, there will be some of them who carry a sorrow which they know well will never be lifted off their shoulders and their hearts, until they lay down all their burdens at the grave's mouth; and it is weary

work to plod on the path of life with a weight that cannot be shifted, with a wound that can never be stanchèd.

Oh, brethren, rosy-coloured optimism is all a dream. The recognition of the good that is in the evil is the devout man's talisman, but there is always need for the resistance and endurance which my texts prescribe. And the youngest of us, the gladdest of us, the least experienced of us, the most frivolous of us, if we will question our own hearts, will hear their Amen to the stern, sad view of the facts of earthly life which underlies this text.

Though it has many other aspects, the world seems to me sometimes to be like that pool at Jerusalem in the five porches of which lay, groaning under various diseases, but none of them without an ache, a great multitude of impotent folk, halt and blind. Astronomers tell us that one, at any rate, of the planets rolls on its orbit swathed in clouds and moisture. The world moves wrapped in a mist of tears. God only knows them all, but each heart knows its own bitterness and responds to the words, 'Ye have need of patience.'

II. Now, secondly, mark the victorious temper.

That is referred to in the one saying by 'he that endureth,' and in the other 'in your endurance.' Now, it is very necessary for the understanding of many places in Scripture to remember that the notion either of patience or of endurance by no means exhausts the power of this noble Christian word. For these are passive virtues, and however excellent and needful they may be, they by no means sum up our duty in regard to the hindrances and sorrows, the burdens and weights, of which I have been trying to speak.

For you know it is only 'what cannot be cured' that 'must be endured,' and even incurable things are not merely to be endured, but they ought to be utilised. It is not enough that we should build up a dam to keep the floods of sorrow and trial from overflowing our fields; we must turn the turbid waters into our sluices, and get them to drive our mills. It is not enough that we should screw ourselves up to lie unresistingly under the surgeon's knife; though God knows that it is as much as we can manage sometimes, and we have to do as convicts under the lash do, get a bit of lead or a bullet into our mouths, and bite at it to keep ourselves from crying out. But that is not all our duty in regard to our trials and difficulties. There is required something more than passive endurance.

This noble word of my texts does mean a great deal more than that. It means active persistence as well as patient submission. It is not enough that we should stand and bear the pelting of the pitiless storm, unmurmuring and unbowed by it; but we are bound to go on our course, bearing up and steering right onwards. Persistent perseverance in the path that is marked out for us is especially the virtue that our Lord here enjoins. It is well to sit still unmurmuring; it is better to march on undiverted and unchecked. And when we are able to keep straight on in the path which is marked out for us, and especially in the path that leads us to God, notwithstanding all opposing voices, and all inward hindrances and reluctances; when we are able to go to our tasks of whatever sort they are, and to do them, though our hearts are beating like sledge-hammers; when we say to ourselves, 'It does not matter a bit whether I am sad or glad,

fresh or wearied, helped or hindered by circumstances, this one thing I do,' then we have come to understand and to practise the grace that our Master here enjoins. The endurance which wins the soul, and leads to salvation, is no mere passive submission, excellent and hard to attain as that often is; but it is brave perseverance in the face of all difficulties, and in spite of all enemies.

Mark how emphatically our Lord here makes the space within which that virtue has to be exercised conterminous with the whole duration of our lives. I need not discuss what 'the end' was in the original application of the words; that would take us too far afield. But this I desire to insist upon, that right on to the very close of life we are to expect the necessity of putting forth the exercise of the very same persistence by which the earlier stages of any noble career must necessarily be marked. In other departments of life there may be relaxation, as a man goes on through the years; but in the culture of our characters, and in the deepening of our faith, and in the drawing near to our God, there must be no cessation or diminution of earnestness and of effort right up to the close.

There are plenty of people, and I dare say that I address some of them now, who began their Christian career full of vigour and with a heat that was too hot to last. But, alas, in a year or two all the fervency was past, and they settled down into the average, easy-going, unprogressive Christian, who is a wet blanket to the devotion and work of a Christian church. I wonder how many of us would scarcely know our own former selves if we could see them. Christian people, to how many of us should the word be rung in our ears: 'Ye did run well; *what* did hinder you'? The answer is—Myself.

But may I say that this emphatic 'to the end' has a special lesson for us older people, who, as natural strength abates and enthusiasm cools down, are apt to be but the shadows of our old selves in many things? But there should be fire within the mountain, though there may be snow on its crest. Many a ship has been lost on the harbour bar; and there is no excuse for the captain leaving the bridge, or the engineer coming up from the engine-room, stormy as the one position and stifling as the other may be, until the anchor is down, and the vessel is moored and quiet in the desired haven. The desert, with its wild beasts and its Bedouin, reaches right up to the city gates, and until we are within these we need to keep our hands on our sword-hilts and be ready for conflict. 'He that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved.'

III. Lastly, note the crown which endurance wins.

Now, I need not spend or waste your time in mere verbal criticism, but I wish to point out that that word 'soul' in one of our two texts means both the soul and the life of which it is the seat; and also to remark that the being saved and the winning of the life or the soul has distinct application, in our Lord's words, primarily to corporeal safety and preservation in the midst of dangers; and, still further, to note the emphatic '*in your patience,*' as suggesting not only a future but a present acquisition of one's own soul, or life, as the result of such persevering endurance and enduring perseverance. All which things being kept in view, I may expand the great promise that lies in my text, as follows:—

First, by such persevering persistence in the Christian path, we gain ourselves. Self-surrender is self-possession. We never own ourselves till we have given up

owning ourselves, and yielded ourselves to that Lord who gives us back saints to ourselves. Self-control is self-possession. We do not own ourselves as long as it is possible for any weakness in flesh, sense, or spirit to gain dominion over us and hinder us from doing what we know to be right. We are not our own masters then. 'Whilst they promise them liberty, they themselves are the bond-slaves of corruption.' It is only when we have the bit well into the jaws of the brutes, and the reins tight in our hands, so that a finger-touch can check or divert the course, that we are truly lords of the chariot in which we ride and of the animals that impel it.

And such self-control which is the winning of ourselves is, as I believe, thoroughly realised only when, by self-surrender of ourselves to Jesus Christ, we get His help to govern ourselves and so become lords of ourselves. Some little petty Rajah, up in the hills, in a quasi-independent State in India, is troubled by mutineers whom he cannot subdue; what does he do? He sends a message down to Lahore or Calcutta, and up come English troops that consolidate his dominion, and he rules securely, when he has consented to become a feudatory, and recognise his overlord. And so you and I, by continual repetition, in the face of self and sin, of our acts of self-surrender, bring Christ into the field; and then, when we have said, 'Lord, take me; I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me'; and when we daily, in spite of hindrances, stand to the surrender and repeat the consecration, then 'in our perseverance we acquire our souls.'

Again, such persistence wins even the bodily life, whether it preserves it or loses it. I have said that the words of our texts have an application to bodily

preservation in the midst of the dreadful dangers of the siege and destruction of Jerusalem. But so regarded they are a paradox. For hear how the Master introduces them: 'Some of you shall they cause to be put to death, but there shall not a hair of your heads perish. In your perseverance ye shall win your lives.' 'Some of you they will put to death,' but ye 'shall win your lives,'—a paradox which can only be solved by experience. Whether this bodily life be preserved or lost, it is gained when it is used as a means of attaining the higher life of union with God. Many a martyr had the promise, 'Not a hair of your head shall perish,' fulfilled at the very moment when the falling axe shore his locks in twain, and severed his head from his body.

Finally, full salvation, the true possession of himself, and the acquisition of the life which really is life, comes to a man who perseveres to the end, and thus passes to the land where he will receive the recompense of the reward. The one moment the runner, with flushed cheek and forward swaying body, hot, with panting breath, and every muscle strained, is straining to the winning-post; and the next moment, in utter calm, he is wearing the crown.

'To the end,' and what a contrast the next moment will be! Brethren, may it be true of you and of me that 'we are not of them that draw back unto perdition, but of them that believe to the winning of their souls!'

THE CARRION AND THE VULTURES

'Wheresoever the carcase is, there will the eagles be gathered together.'

MATT. xxiv. 28.

THIS grim parable has, of course, a strong Eastern colouring. It is best appreciated by dwellers in those lands. They tell us that no sooner is some sickly animal dead, or some piece of carrion thrown out by the way, than the vultures—for the eagle does not prey upon carrion—appear. There may not have been one visible a moment before in the hot blue sky, but, taught by scent or by sight that their banquet is prepared, they come flocking from all corners of the heavens, a hideous crowd round their hideous meal, fighting with flapping wings and tearing it with their strong talons. And so, says Christ, wherever there is a rotting, dead society, a carcase hopelessly corrupt and evil, down upon it, as if drawn by some unerring attraction, will come the angels, the vultures of the divine judgment.

The words of my text were spoken, according to the version of them in Luke's Gospel, in answer to a question from the disciples. Our Lord had been discoursing, in very solemn words, which, starting from the historical event of the impending fall of Jerusalem, had gradually passed into a description of the greater event of His second coming. And all these solemn warnings had stirred nothing deeper in the bosoms of the disciples than a tepid and idle curiosity which expressed itself in the one almost irrelevant question, 'Where, Lord?' He answers—Not here, not there, but everywhere where there is a carcase. The great event which is referred to in our Lord's solemn words is a future judgment,

which is to be universal. But the words are not exhausted in their reference to that event. There have been many 'comings of the Lord,' many 'days of the Lord,' which on a smaller scale have embodied the same principles as are to be displayed in world-wide splendour and awfulness at the last.

I. The first thing, then, in these most true and solemn words is this, that they are to us a revelation of a law which operates with unerring certainty through all the course of the world's history.

We cannot tell, but God can, when evil has become incurable; or when, in the language of my text, the mass of any community has become a carcase. There may be flickerings of life, all unseen by our eyes, or there may be death, all unsuspected by our shallow vision. So long as there is a possibility of amendment, 'sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily'; and God dams back, as it were, the flow of His retributive judgment, 'not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to the knowledge of the truth.' But when He sees that all is vain, that no longer is restoration or recovery possible, then He lets loose the flood; or, in the language of my text, when the thing has become a carcase, then the vultures, God's scavengers, come and clear it away from off the face of the earth.

Now that is the law that has been working from the beginning, working as well in regard to the long delays as in regard to the swift execution. There is another metaphor, in the Old Testament, that puts the same idea in a very striking form. It speaks about God's 'awakening,' as if His judgment slumbered. All round that dial the hand goes creeping, creeping, creeping slowly, but when it comes to the appointed line, then

the bell strikes. And so years and centuries go by, all chance of recovery departs, and then the crash! The ice palace, built upon the frozen blocks, stands for a while, but when the spring thaws come, it breaks up.

Let me remind you of some instances and illustrations. Take that story which people stumble over in the early part of the Old Testament revelation—the sweeping away of those Canaanitish nations whose hideous immoralities had turned the land into a perfect sty of abominations. There they had been wallowing, and God's Spirit, which strives with men ever and always, had been striving with them, we know not for how long, but when the time came at which, according to the grim metaphor of the Old Testament, 'the measure of their iniquity was full,' then He hurled upon them the fierce hosts out of the desert, and in a whirlwind of fire and sword swept them off the face of the earth.

Take another illustration. These very people, who had been the executioners of divine judgment, settled in the land, fell into the snare—and you know the story. The captivities of Israel and Judah were other illustrations of the same thing. The fall of Jerusalem, to which our Lord pointed in the solemn context of these words, was another. For millenniums God had been pleading with them, sending His prophets, rising early and sending, saying, 'Oh, do not do this abominable thing which I hate!' 'And last of all He sent His Son.' Christ being rejected, God had shot His last bolt. He had no more that He could do. Christ being refused, the nation's doom was fixed and sealed, and down came the eagles of Rome, again God's scavengers, to sweep away the nation on which had been lavished such wealth of divine love, but which had now come to be a rotting abomination, and to this day remains in a

living death, a miraculously preserved monument of God's judgments.

Take another illustration how, once more, the executors of the law fall under its power. That nation which crushed the feeble resources of Judæa, as a giant might crush a mosquito in his grasp, in its turn became honeycombed with abominations and immoralities; and then down from the frozen north came the fierce Gothic tribes over the Roman territory. One of their captains called himself the 'Scourge of God,' and he was right. Another swooping down of the vultures flashed from the blue heavens, and the carrion was torn to fragments by their strong beaks.

Take one more illustration—that French Revolution at the end of the eighteenth century. The fathers sowed the wind, and the children reaped the whirlwind. Generations of heartless luxury, selfishness, carelessness of the cry of the poor, immoral separation of class from class, and all the sins which a ruling caste could commit against a subject people, had prepared for the convulsion. Then, in a carnival of blood and deluges of fire and sulphur, the rotten thing was swept off the face of the earth, and the world breathed more freely for its destruction.

Take another illustration, through which many of us have lived. The bitter legacy of negro slavery that England gave to her giant son across the Atlantic, which blasted and sucked the strength out of that great republic, went down amidst universal execration. It took centuries for the corpse to be ready, but when the vultures came they made quick work of it.

And so, as I say, all over the world, and from the beginning of time, with delays according to the possibilities of restoration and recovery which the divine

eye discerns, this law is working. Verily there is a God that judgeth in the earth. 'The wheels of God grind slowly, but they grind exceeding small.' 'Where-soever the carcase is, there will the eagles be gathered together.'

And has the law exhausted its force? Are there going to be no more applications of it? Are there no European societies at this day that in their godlessness and social iniquities are hurrying fast to the condition of carrion? Look around us—drunkenness, sensual immorality, commercial dishonesty, senseless luxury amongst the rich, heartless indifference to the wail of the poor, godlessness over all classes and ranks of the community. Surely, surely, if the body politic be not dead, it is sick nigh unto death. And I, for my part, have little hesitation in saying that as far as one can see, European society is driving as fast as it can, with its godlessness and immorality, to such another 'day of the Lord' as these words of my text suggest. Let us see to it that we do our little part to be the 'salt of the earth' which shall keep it from rotting, and so drive away the vultures of judgment.

II. But let me turn to another point. We have here a law which is to have a far more tremendous accomplishment in the future.

There have been many comings of the Lord, many days of the Lord, when, as Isaiah says in his magnificent vision of one such, 'the loftiness of man has been bowed down, and the haughtiness of man made low, and the Lord alone exalted in that day when He arises to shake terribly the earth.' And all these 'days of the Lord' are prophecies, and distinctly point to a future 'day,' when the same principles which have been disclosed as working on a small scale in them,

shall be manifested in full embodiment. These 'days of the Lord' proclaim '*the* day of the Lord.' In the prophecies both of the Old and New Testaments that universal future judgment is seen glimmering through the descriptions of the nearer partial judgments. So interpreters are puzzled to say at what point in a prophecy the transition is made from the smaller to the greater. The prophecies are like the diagrams in treatises on perspective, in which diverging lines are drawn from the eye, enclosing a square or other figure, and which, as they recede further from the point of view, enclose a figure, the same in shape but of greater dimensions. There is a historical event foretold, the fall of Jerusalem. It is close up to the eyes of the disciples, and is comparatively small. Carry out the lines that touch its corners and define its shape, and upon the far distant curtain of the dim future there is thrown a like figure immensely larger, the coming of Jesus Christ to judge the world. All these little premonitions and foretastes and anticipatory specimens point onwards to the assured termination of the world's history in that great and solemn day, when all men shall be gathered before Christ's throne, and He shall judge all nations—judge you and me amongst the rest. That future judgment is distinctly a part of the Christian revelation. Jesus Christ is to come in bodily form as He went away. All men are to be judged by Him. That judgment is to be the destruction of opposing forces, the sweeping away of the carrion of moral evil.

It is therefore distinctly a part of the message that is to be preached by us, under penalty of the awful condemnation pronounced on the watchman who seeth the sword coming and gives no warning. It is not

becoming to make such a solemn message the opportunity for pictorial rhetoric, which vulgarises its greatness and weakens its power. But it is worse than an offence against taste; it is unfaithfulness to the preaching which God bids us, treason to our King, and cruelty to our hearers, to suppress the warning—‘The day of the Lord cometh.’ There are many temptations to put it in the background. Many of you do not want that kind of preaching. You want the gentle side of divine revelation. You say to us in fact, though not in words, ‘Prophesy to us smooth things. Tell us about the infinite love which wraps all mankind in its embrace. Speak to us of the Father God, who “hateth nothing that He hath made.” Magnify the mercy and gentleness and tenderness of Christ. Do not say anything about that other side. It is not in accordance with the tendencies of modern thought.’

So much the worse, then, for the tendencies of modern thought. I yield to no man in the ardour of my belief that the centre of all revelation is the revelation of a God of infinite love, but I cannot forget that there is such a thing as ‘the terror of the Lord,’ and I dare not disguise my conviction that no preaching sounds every string in the manifold harp of God’s truth, which does not strike that solemn note of warning of judgment to come.

Such suppression is unfaithfulness. Surely, if we preachers believe that tremendous truth, we are bound to speak. It is cruel kindness to be silent. If a traveller is about to plunge into some gloomy jungle infested by wild beasts, he is a friend who sits by the wayside to warn him of his danger. Surely you would not call a signalman unfeeling because he held out a red lamp when he knew that just round the curve

beyond his cabin the rails were up, and that any train that reached the place would go over in horrid ruin. Surely that preaching is not justly charged with harshness which rings out the wholesome proclamation of a day of judgment, when we shall each give account of ourselves to the divine-human Judge.

Such suppression weakens the power of the Gospel, which is the proclamation of deliverance, not only from the power, but also from the future retribution of sin. In such a maimed gospel there is but an enfeebled meaning given to that idea of deliverance. And though the thing that breaks the heart and draws men to God is not terror, but love, the terror must often be evoked in order to lead to love. It is only 'judgment to come' which will make Felix tremble, and though his trembling may pass away, and he be none the nearer the kingdom, there will never any good be done to him unless he does tremble. So, for all these reasons, all faithful preaching of Christ's Gospel must include the proclamation of Christ as Judge.

But, if I should be unfaithful, if I did not preach this truth, what shall we call you if you turn away from it? You would not think it a wise thing of the engine-driver to shut his eyes if the red lamp *were* shown, and to go along at full speed and to pay no heed to that? Do you think it would be right for a Christian minister to lock his lips and never say, 'There is a judgment to come'? And do you think it is wise of you not to think of that, and to shape your conduct accordingly?

Oh, dear friends! I do not doubt that the centre of all divine revelation is the love of God, nor do I doubt that incomparably the highest representation of the power of Christ's Gospel is that it draws men away from the love and the practice of evil, and makes them

pure and holy. But that is not all. There is not only the practice and the power of sin to be fought against, but there is the penalty of sin to be taken into account ; and as sure as you are living, and as sure as there is a God above us, so sure is it that there is a Day of Judgment, when 'He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He hath ordained.' The believing of that is not salvation, but the belief of that seems to me to be indispensable for any vigorous grasp of the delivering love of God in Jesus Christ our Lord.

III. And so the last thing that I have to say is that this is a law which need never touch you, nor you know anything about but by the hearing of the ear.

It is told us that we may escape it. When Paul reasoned of righteousness, and temperance, and judgment to come, his hearer trembled as he listened, but there was an end. But the true effect of this message is the effect that Paul himself attached to it when he said in the hearing of Athenian wisdom, 'God hath commanded all men everywhere *to repent*, because He hath appointed a day in the which He will judge the world in righteousness.' Judgment faithfully preached is the preparation for preaching that 'there is no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus.' If we trust in that great Saviour, we shall be quickened from the death of sin, and so shall not be food for the vultures of judgment. Can these corpses live? Can this eating putrescence, which burrows its foul way through our souls, be sweetened? Is there any antiseptic for it? Yes, blessed be God, and the hand whose touch healed the leper will heal us, and 'our flesh will come again as the flesh of a little child.' Christ has bared His breast to the divine judgments against sin, and if by

faith we shelter ourselves in Him, we shall never know the terrors of that awful day.

Be sure that judgment to come is no mere figure dressed up to frighten children, nor the product of blind superstition, but that it is the inevitable issue of the righteousness of the All-ruling God. You and I and all the sons of men have to face it. 'Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness before Him in the Day of Judgment.' Betake yourselves, as poor sinful creatures who know something of the corruption of your own hearts, to that dear Christ who has died on the Cross for you, and all that is obnoxious to the divine judgments will, by His transforming life breathed into you, be taken out of your hearts; and when that 'day of the Lord' shall dawn, you, trusting in the sacrifice of Him who is your Judge, will 'have a song as when a holy solemnity is kept.' Take Christ for your Saviour, and then, when the vultures of judgment, with their mighty black pinions, are wheeling and circling in the sky, ready to pounce upon their prey, He will gather you 'as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings,' and beneath their shadow you will be safe.

WATCHING FOR THE KING

'Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come. 43. But know this, that if the goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up. 44. Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of Man cometh. 45. Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his lord hath made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season? 46. Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing. 47. Verily I say unto you, That he shall make him ruler over all his goods. 48. But and if that evil servant shall say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming; 49. And shall begin to smite his fellow-servants, and to eat and drink with the drunken; 50. The lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not

for him, and in an hour that he is not aware of, 51. And shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'—MATT. xxiv. 42-51.

THE long day's work was nearly done. Christ had left the temple, never to return. He took His way across the Mount of Olives to Bethany, and was stayed by the disciples' question as to the date of the destruction of the temple, which He had foretold, and of the 'end of the world,' which they attached to it. They could not fancy the world lasting without the temple! We often make a like mistake. So there, on the hillside, looking across to the city lying in the sad, fading evening light, He spoke the prophecies of this chapter, which begin with the destruction of Jerusalem, and insensibly merge into the final coming of the Son of Man, of which that was a prelude and a type. The difficulty of accurately apportioning the details of this prophecy to the future events which fulfil them is common to it with all prophecy, of which it is a characteristic to blend events which, in the fulfilment, are far apart. From the mountain top, the eye travels over great stretches of country, but does not see the gorges, separating points which seem close together, fore-shortened by distance.

There are many comings of the Son of Man before His final coming for final judgment, and the nearer and smaller ones are themselves prophecies. So, we do not need to settle the chronology of unfulfilled prophecy in order to get the full benefit of Christ's teachings here. In its moral and spiritual effect on us, the uncertainty of the time of our going to Christ is nearly identical with the uncertainty of the time of His coming to us.

I. The command of watchfulness enforced by our ignorance of the time of His coming (vs. 42-44). The

two commands at the beginning and end of the paragraph are not quite the same. 'Be ye ready' is the consequence of watchfulness. Nor are the two appended reasons the same; for the first command is grounded on His coming at a day when 'ye *know* not,' and the second on His coming 'in an hour that ye *think* not,' that is to say, it not only is uncertain, but unexpected and surprising. There may also be a difference worth noting in the different designations of Christ as 'your Lord,' standing in a special relation to you, and as 'the Son of Man,' of kindred with all men, and their Judge. What is this 'watchfulness'? It is literally wakefulness. We are beset by perpetual temptations to sleep, to spiritual drowsiness and torpor. 'An opium sky rains down soporifics.' And without continual effort, our perception of the unseen realities and our alertness for service will be lulled to sleep. The religion of multitudes is a sleepy religion. Further, it is a vivid and ever-present conviction of His certain coming, and consequently a habitual realising of the transience of the existing order of things, and of the fast-approaching realities of the future. Further, it is the keeping of our minds in an attitude of expectation and desire, our eyes ever travelling to the dim distance to mark the far-off shining of His coming. What a miserable contrast to this is the temper of professing Christendom as a whole! It is swallowed up in the present, wide awake to interests and hopes belonging to this 'bank and shoal of time,' but sunk in slumber as to that great future, or, if ever the thought of it intrudes, shrinking, rather than desire, accompanies it, and it is soon hustled out of mind.

Christ bases His command on our ignorance of the time of His coming. It was no part of His purpose in

this prophecy to remove that ignorance, and no calculations of the chronology of unfulfilled predictions have pierced the darkness. It was His purpose that from generation to generation His servants should be kept in the attitude of expectation, as of an event that may come at any time and must come at some time. The parallel uncertainty of the time of death, though not what is meant here, serves the same moral end if rightly used, and the fact of death is exposed to the same danger of being neglected because of the very uncertainty, which ought to be one chief reason for keeping it ever in view. Any future event, which combines these two things, absolute certainty that it will happen, and utter uncertainty when it will happen, ought to have power to insist on being remembered, at least, till it was prepared for, and would have it, if men were not such fools. Christ's coming would be oftener contemplated if it were more welcome. But what sort of a servant is he, who has no glow of gladness at the thought of meeting his lord? True Christians are 'all them that have loved His appearing.'

The illustrative example which separates these two commands is remarkable. The householder's ignorance of the time when the thief would come is the reason why he does not watch. He cannot keep awake all night, and every night, to be ready for him; so he has to go to sleep, and is robbed. But our ignorance is a reason for wakefulness, because we can keep awake all the night of life. The householder watches to prevent, but we to share in, that for which the watch is kept. The figure of the thief is chosen to illustrate the one point of the unexpected stealthy approach. But is there not deep truth in it, to the effect that Christ's coming is like that of a robber to those who are

asleep, depriving them of earthly treasures? The word rendered 'broken up' means literally 'dug through,' and points to a clay or mud house, common in the East, which is entered, not by bursting open doors or windows, but by digging through the wall. Death comes to men sunk in spiritual slumber, to strip them of good which they would fain keep, and makes his entrance by a breach in the earthly house of this tabernacle. So St. Paul, in his earliest Epistle, refers to this saying (a proof of the early diffusion of the gospel narrative), and says, 'Ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief.'

II. The picture and reward of watchfulness. The general exhortation to watch is followed by a pair of contrasted parable portraits, primarily applicable to the apostles and to those 'set over His household.' But if we remember what Christ taught as the condition of pre-eminence in His kingdom, we shall not confine their application to an order.

'The least flower with a brimming cup may stand,
And share its dew-drop with another near,'

and the most slenderly endowed Christian has some crumb of the bread of life intrusted to him to dispense. It is to be observed that watchfulness is not mentioned in this portraiture of the faithful servant. It is presupposed as the basis and motive of his service. So we learn the double lesson that the attitude of continual outlook for the Lord is needed, if we are to discharge the tasks which He has set us, and that the true effect of watchfulness is to harness us to the car of duty. Many other motives actuate Christian faithfulness, but all are reinforced by this, and where it is feeble they

are more or less inoperative. We cannot afford to lose its influence. A Church or a soul which has ceased to be looking for Him will have let all its tasks drop from its drowsy hands, and will feel the power of other constraining motives of Christian service but faintly, as in a half-dream.

On the other hand, true waiting for Him is best expressed in the quiet discharge of accustomed and appointed tasks. The right place for the servant to be found, when the Lord comes, is 'so doing' as He commands, however secular the task may be. That was a wise judge who, when sudden darkness came on, and people thought the end of the world was at hand, said, 'Bring lights, and let us go on with the case. We cannot be better employed, if the end has come, than in doing our duty.' Flighty impatience of common tasks is not watching for the King, as Paul had to teach the Thessalonians, who were 'shaken' in mind by the thought of the day of the Lord; but the proper attitude of the watchers is 'that ye study to be quiet, and to do your own business.'

Observe, further, the interrogative form of the parable. The question is the sharp point which gives penetrating power, and suggests Christ's high estimate of the worth and difficulty of such conduct, and sets us to ask for ourselves, 'Lord, is it I?' The servant is 'faithful' inasmuch as he does his Lord's will, and rightly uses the goods intrusted to him, and 'wise' inasmuch as he is 'faithful.' For a single-hearted devotion to Christ is the parent of insight into duty, and the best guide to conduct; and whoever seeks only to be true to his Lord in the use of his gifts and possessions, will not lack prudence to guide him in giving to each his food, and that in due season. The two charac-

teristics are connected in another way also; for, if the outcome of faithfulness be taken into account, its wisdom is plain, and he who has been faithful even unto death will be seen to have been wise though he gave up all, when the crown of eternal life sparkles on his forehead. Such faithfulness and wisdom (which are at bottom but two names for one course of conduct) find their motive in that watchfulness, which works as ever in the great Taskmaster's eye, and as ever keeping in view His coming, and the rendering of account to Him.

The reward of the faithful servant is stated in language similar to that of the parable of the talents. Faithfulness in a narrower sphere leads to a wider. The reward for true work is more work, of nobler sort and on a grander scale. That is true for earth and for heaven. If we do His will here, we shall one day exchange the subordinate place of the steward for the authority of the ruler, and the toil of the servant for the 'joy of the Lord.' The soul that is joined to Christ and is one in will with Him has all things for its servants; and he who uses all things for his own and his brethren's highest good is lord of them all, while he walks amid the shadows of time, and will be lifted to loftier dominion over a grander world when he passes hence.

III. The picture and doom of the unwatchful servant. This portrait presupposes that a long period will elapse before Christ comes. The secret thought of the evil servant is the thought of a time far down the ages from the moment of our Lord's speaking. It would take centuries for such a temper to be developed in the Church. What is the temper? A secret dismissal of the participation of the Lord's return, and that not

merely because He has been long in coming, but as thinking that He has broken His word, and has not come when He said that He would. This unspoken dimming over of the expectation and unconfessed doubt of the firmness of the promise, is the natural product of the long time of apparent delay which the Church has had to encounter. It will cloud and depress the religion of later ages, unless there be constant effort to resist the tendency and to keep awake. The first generations were all aflame with the glad hope 'Maranatha'—'The Lord is at hand.' Their successors gradually lost that keenness of expectation, and at most cried, 'Will not He come soon?' Their successors saw the starry hope through thickening mists of years; and now it scarcely shines for many, or at least is but a dim point, when it should blaze as a sun.

He was an 'evil' servant who said so in his heart. He was evil because he said it, and he said it because he was evil; for the yielding to sin and the withdrawal of love from Jesus dim the desire for His coming, and make the whisper that He delays, a hope; while, on the other hand, the hope that He delays helps to open the sluices, and let sin flood the life. So an outburst of cruel masterfulness and of riotous sensuality is the consequence of the dimmed expectation. There would have been no usurpation of authority over Christ's heritage by priest or pope, or any other, if that hope had not become faint. If professing Christians lived with the great white throne and the heavens and earth fleeing away before Him that sits on it, ever burning before their inward eye, how could they wallow amid the mire of animal indulgence? The corruptions of the Church, especially of its official members, are traced with sad and prescient hand in

these foreboding words, which are none the less a prophecy because cast by His forbearing gentleness into the milder form of a supposition.

The dreadful doom of the unwatchful servant is couched in terms of awful severity. The cruel punishment of sawing asunder, which, tradition says, was suffered by Isaiah and was not unfamiliar in old times, is his. What concealed terror of retribution it signifies we do not know. Perhaps it points to a fate in which a man shall be, as it were, parted into two, each at enmity with the other. Perhaps it implies a retribution in kind for his sin, which consisted, as the next clause implies, in hypocrisy, which is the sundering in twain of inward conviction and practice, and is to be avenged by a like but worse rending apart of conscience and will. At all events, it shadows a fearful retribution, which is not extinction, inasmuch as, in the next clause, we read that his portion—his lot, or that condition which belongs to him by virtue of his character—is with ‘the hypocrites.’ He was one of them, because, while he said ‘my lord,’ he had ceased to love and obey, having ceased to desire and expect; and therefore whatever is their fate shall be his, even to the ‘dividing asunder of soul and spirit,’ and setting eternal discord among the thoughts and intents of the heart. That is not the punishment of unwatchfulness, but of what unwatchfulness leads to, if unawakened. Let these words of the King ring an alarum for us all, and rouse our sleepy souls to watch, as becomes the children of the day.

THE WAITING MAIDENS

'Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom. 2. And five of them were wise, and five were foolish. 3. They that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them: 4. But the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. 5. While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept. 6. And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him. 7. Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps. 8. And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil; for our lamps are gone out. 9. But the wise answered, saying, Not so; lest there be not enough for us and you: but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves. 10. And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut. 11. Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. 12. But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not. 13. Watch therefore; for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of Man cometh.'—MATT. xxv. 1-13.

WE shall best understand this beautiful but difficult parable if we look on to its close. Our Lord appends to it the refrain of all this context, the exhortation to watch, based upon our ignorance of the time of His coming. But as in the former little parable of the wise servant it was his faithful, wise dispensing of his lord's goods, and not his watchfulness, which was the point of the eulogium passed on him, so here it is the readiness of the wise virgins to take their places in the wedding march which is commended. That readiness consists in their having their lamps burning and their oil in store. This, then, is the main thing in the parable. It is an exhibition, under another aspect, of what constitutes fitness for entrance into the festal chamber of the bridegroom, which had just been set forth as consisting in faithful stewardship. Here it is presented as being the possession of lamp and oil.

I. The first consideration, then, must be, What is the meaning of these emblems? A great deal of fine-spun ingenuity has been expended on subordinate points in the parable, such as the significance of the number of

maidens, the conclusions from the equal division into wise and foolish, the place from which they came to meet the bridegroom, the point in the marriage procession where they are supposed to join it, whether it was at going to fetch the bride, or at coming back with her ; whether the feast is held in her house, or in his, and so on. But all these are unimportant questions, and as Christ has left them in the background, we only destroy the perspective by dragging them into the front. In no parable is it more important than in this to restrain the temptation to run out analogies into their last results. The remembrance that the virgins, as the emblem of the whole body of the visible Church, are the same as the bride, who does not appear in the parable, might warn against such an error. They were ten, as being the usual number for such a company, or as being the round number naturally employed when definiteness was not sought. They were divided equally, not because our Lord desired to tell, but because He wished to leave unnoticed, the numerical proportion of the two classes. One set are 'wise' and the other 'foolish,' because He wishes to show not only the sin, but the absurdity, of unreadiness, and to teach us that true wisdom is not of the head only, but far more of the heart. The conduct of the two groups of maidens is looked at from the prudent and common-sense standpoint, and the provident action of the one sets in relief the reckless stupidity of the other.

There have been many opinions as to the meaning of the lamps and the oil, which it is needless to repeat. Surely the analogy of scriptural symbolism is our best guide. If we follow it, we get a meaning which perfectly suits the emblems and the whole parable. In the Sermon on the Mount, our Lord uses the same figure

of the lamp, and explains it: 'Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works.'

II. Note the sleep of all the virgins. No blame is hinted on account of it. It is not inconsistent with the wisdom of the wise, nor does it interfere with their readiness to meet the bridegroom. It is, then, such a sleep as is compatible with watching. Our Lord's introduction of this point is an example of His merciful allowance for our weakness. There must be a certain slackening of the tension of expectation when the bridegroom tarries. Centuries of delay cannot but modify the attitude of the waiting Church, and Jesus here implies that there will be a long stretch of time before His advent, during which all His people will feel the natural effect of the deferring of hope. But the sleep which He permits, unblamed, is light, and such as one takes by snatches when waiting to be called. He does not ask us always to be on tiptoe of expectation, nor to refuse the teaching of experience; but counts that we have watched aright, if we wake from our light slumbers when the cry is heard, and have our lamps lit, ready for the procession.

III. Then comes the midnight cry and the waking of the maidens. The hour, 'of night's black arch the keystone,' suggests the unexpectedness of His coming; the loudness of the cry, its all-awaking effect; the broken words of the true reading, 'Behold the bridegroom!' the closeness on the heels of the heralds with which the procession flashes through the darkness. The virgins had 'gone forth to meet him' at the beginning of the parable, but the going forth to which they are now summoned is not the same. The Christian soul goes forth once when, at the beginning of its Christian life, it forsakes the world to

wait for and on Christ, and again, when it leaves the world to pass with Him into the banquet. Life is the slumber from which some are awaked by the voice of death, and some who 'remain' shall be awaked by the trumpet of judgment. There is no interval between the cry and the appearance of the bridegroom; only a moment to rouse themselves, to look to their lamps, and to speak the hurried words of the foolish and the answer of the wise, and then the procession is upon them. It is all done as in a flash, 'in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye.' This impression of swiftness, which leaves no time for delayed preparation, is the uniform impression conveyed by all the Scripture references to the coming of the Lord. The swoop of the eagle, the fierce blaze of lightning from one side of the sky to the other, the bursting of the flood, that morning's work at Sodom, not begun till dawn and finished before the 'sun was risen on the earth,' are its types. Foolish indeed to postpone preparation till that moment when cry and coming are simultaneous, like lightning and thunder right overhead!

The foolish virgins' imploring request and its answer are not to be pressed, as if they meant more than to set forth the hopelessness of then attempting to procure the wanting oil, and especially the hopelessness of attempting to get it from one's fellows. There is a world of suppressed terror and surprise in that cry, 'Our lamps are going out.' Note that they burned till the bridegroom came, and then, like the magic lamps in old legends, at his approach shivered into darkness. Is not that true of the formal, outward religion, which survives everything but contact with His all-seeing eye and perfect judgment? These foolish maidens were as much astonished as alarmed at seeing their

lights flicker down to extinction; and it is possible for professing Christians to live a lifetime, and never to be found out either by themselves or by anybody else. But if there has been no oil in the lamp, it will be quenched when He appears. The atmosphere that surrounds His throne acts like oxygen on the oil-fed flame, and like carbonic acid gas on the other.

The answer of the wise is not selfishness. It is not from our fellows, however bright their lamps, that we can ever get that inward grace. None of them has more than suffices for his own needs, nor can any give it to another. It may be bought, on the same terms as the pearl of great price was bought, 'without money'; but the market is closed, as on a holiday, on the day of the king's son's marriage. That is not touched upon here, except in so far as it is hinted at in the absence of the foolish when he enters the banqueting chamber, and in their fruitless prayer. They had no time to get the oil before he came, and they had not got it when they returned. The lesson is plain. We can only get the new life of the Spirit, which will make our lives a light, from God; and we can get it now, not then.

IV. We see the wise virgins within and the foolish without. They are, indeed, no longer designated by these adjectives, but as 'ready' and 'the others'; for preparedness is fitness, and they who are found of Him in possession of the outward righteousness and of its inward source, His own divine life in them, are prepared. To such the gates of the festal chamber fly open. In that day, place is the outcome of character, and it is equally impossible for the 'ready' to be shut out, and for 'the others' to go in.

‘When the bridegroom with his feastful friends passes to bliss at the mid hour of night,’ they who have ‘filled their odorous lamps with deeds of light’ have surely ‘gained their entrance.’ There is silence as to the unspeakable joys of the wedding feast. Some faint sounds of music and dancing, some gleams from the lighted windows, find their way out; but the closed door keeps its secret, and only the guests know the gladness.

That closed door means security, perpetuity, untold blessedness, but it means exclusion too. The piteous reiterated call of the shut-out maidens, roused too late, and so suddenly, from songs and laughter to vain cries, evokes a stern answer, through which shines the awful reality veiled in the parable. We do not need to regard the prayer for entrance, and its refusal, as conveying more than the fruitlessness of wishes for entrance then, when unaccompanied with fitness to enter. Such desire as is expressed in this passionate beating at the closed door, with hoarse entreaties, is not fitness. If it were, the door would open; and the reason why it does not lies in the bridegroom’s awful answer, ‘I know you not.’ The absence of the qualification prevents his recognising them as his. Surely the unalleviated darkness of a hopeless exclusion settles down on these sad five, standing, huddled together, at the door, with the extinguished lamps hanging in their despairing hands. ‘Too late, too late, ye cannot enter now.’ The wedding bell has become a funeral knell. They were not the enemies of the bridegroom, they thought themselves his friends. They let life ebb without securing the one thing needful, and the neglect was irremediable. There is a tragedy underlying many a life of outward religiousness and inward emptiness, and a dreadful

discovery will flare in upon such, when they have to say to themselves,

‘This might have been once,
And we missed it, lost it for ever.’

DYING LAMPS

‘Our lamps are gone out.’—MATT. xxv. 8.

THIS is one of the many cases in which the Revised Version, by accuracy of rendering the tense of a verb, gives a much more striking as well as correct reproduction of the original than the Authorised Version does. The former reads ‘going out,’ instead of ‘gone out,’ a rendering which the Old Version has, unfortunately, relegated to the margin. It is clearly to be preferred, not only because it more correctly represents the Greek, but because it sets before us a more solemn and impressive picture of the precise time at which the terrible discovery was made by the foolish five. They woke from their sleep, and hastily trimmed their lamps. These burned brightly for a moment, and then began to flicker and die down. The extinction of their light was not the act of a moment, but was a gradual process, which had advanced in some degree before it attracted the attention of the bearers of the lamps. At last it roused the half-sleeping five into startled, wide-awake consciousness. There is a tone of alarm and fear in their sudden exclamation, ‘Our lamps are going out.’ They see now the catastrophe that threatens, and understand that the only means of averting it is to replenish the empty oil-vessels before the flame has quite expired. But their knowledge and

their dread were alike too late, and, as they went on their hopeless search for some one to give them what they once might have had in abundance, the last faint flicker ceased, and they had to grope their way in the dark, with their lightless lamps hanging useless in their slack hands, while far off the torches of the bridal procession, in which they might have had a part, flashed through the night. We have nothing to do with the tragical issue of the process of extinction; but solemn lessons of universal application gather round the picture of that process, as represented in our text, and to these we turn now.

I. We must settle the meaning of the oil and the lamps.

The Old Testament symbolism is our best guide as to the significance of the oil. Throughout it, oil symbolises the divine influences that come down on men appointed by God to their several functions, and which are there traced to the Spirit of the Lord. So the priests were set apart by unction with the holy oil; so Samuel poured oil on the black locks of Saul. So, too, the very name Messiah means 'anointed,' and the great prophecy, which Jesus claimed for His own in His first sermon in the synagogue at Nazareth, put into the Messiah's lips the declaration, 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He hath anointed Me.' But there are Old Testament symbols which bear still more closely on the emblems of our text. Zechariah saw in vision a golden lamp-stand with seven lamps, and on either side of it an olive tree, from which oil flowed through golden pipes to feed the flame. The interpretation of the vision was given by the 'angel that talked with' the prophet as being, 'not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord.'

So, then, we follow the plainly marked road and Scripture use of a symbol when we take the oil in this parable to be that which every listener to Jesus, who was instructed in the old things which he was bringing forth with new emphasis from the ancient treasure-house of the word of God, would take it to be—namely, the sum of the influences from Heaven which were bestowed through the Spirit of the Lord.

Such being the meaning of the oil, what was meant by the lamp? We have no intention of discussing here the many varying interpretations which have been given to the symbol. To do so would lead us too far afield. We can only say that the interpretation of the oil as the influence of the Holy Spirit necessarily involves the explanation of the lamp which is fed by it, as being the spiritual life of the individual, which is nourished and made visible to the world as light, by the continual communication from God of these hallowing influences. Turning again to the Old Testament, I need only remind you of the great seven-branched lamp which stood in the Tabernacle, and afterwards in the Temple. It was the symbol of the collective Israel, as recipient of divine influences, and thereby made the light of a dark world. Its rays streamed out over the desert first, and afterwards shone from the mountain of the Lord's house, beaming illumination and invitation to those who sat in darkness to behold the great light, and to walk in the light of the Lord. Zechariah's emblem was based on the Temple lamp. In accordance with the greater prominence given by the Old Testament to national than to individual religion, both of these represented the people as a whole. In accordance with the more advanced individualism of the New Testament, our

text so far varies the application of the emblem, that each of the ten virgins who, as a whole, stand for the collective professing Church, has her own lamp. But that is the only difference between the Old and the New Testament uses of the symbol.

I need not remind you how the same metaphor recurs frequently in the teachings of our Lord and of the Apostles. Sometimes the Old Testament collective point of view is maintained, as in our Lord's saying in the Sermon on the Mount, 'Ye are the light of the world,' but more frequently, the characteristic individualising of the figure prevails, and we read of Christians shining 'as lights in the world,' and each holding forth, as a lamp does its light, 'the word of life.' Nor must we forget the climax of the uses of this emblem, in the vision of the Apocalypse, where John once more saw the Lord, on whose bosom his head had so often peacefully lain, 'walking in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks.' There, again, the collective rather than the individual bearing of the figure is prominent, but with significant differences from the older use of it. In Judaism there was a formal, outward unity, represented by the one lamp with its manifold lights, all welded together on the golden stem; but the churches of Asia Minor were distinct organisations, and their oneness came, not from outward union of a mechanical kind, but from the presence in their midst of the Son of God.

The sum of all this course of thought is that the lamp is the Christian life of the individual sustained by the communication of the influences of God's Holy Spirit.

II. We note next the gradual dying out of the light. 'Our lamps are going out.'

All spiritual emotions and vitality, like every other kind of emotion and vitality, die unless nourished. Let no theological difficulties about 'the final perseverance of the saints,' or 'the indefeasibleness of grace,' and the impossibility of slaying the divine life that has once been given to a man, come in the way of letting this parable have its full, solemn weight. These foolish virgins had oil and had light, the oil failed by their fault, and so the light went out, and they were startled, when they awoke from their slumber, to see how, instead of brilliant flame, there was smoking wick.

Dear brethren, let us take the lesson. There is nothing in our religious emotions which has any guarantee of perpetuity in it, except upon certain conditions. We may live, and our life may ebb. We may trust, and our trust may tremble into unbelief. We may obey, and our obedience may be broken by the mutinous risings of self-will. We may walk in the 'paths of righteousness,' and our feet may falter and turn aside. There is certainty of the dying out of all communicated life, unless the channel of communication with the life from which it was first kindled, be kept constantly clear. The lamp may be 'a burning and a shining light,' or, more accurately translating the phrase of our Lord, 'a light kindled and' (therefore) 'shining,' but it will be light 'for a season' only, unless it is fed from that from which it was first set alight; and that is from God Himself.

'Our lamps are going out,'—a slow process that! The flame does not all die into darkness in a minute. There are stages in its death. The white portion of the flame becomes smaller and the blue part extends; then the flame flickers, and finally shudders itself, as

it were, off the wick; then nothing remains but a charred red line along the top; then that line breaks up into little points, and one after another these twinkle out, and then all is black, and the lamp is gone out. And so, slowly, like the ebbing away of the tide, like the reluctant, long-protracted dying of summer days, like the dropping of the blood from some fatal wound, by degrees the process of extinction creeps, creeps, creeps on, and the lamp that was going is finally gone out.

III. Again, we note that extinction is brought about simply by doing nothing.

These five foolish virgins did not stray away into any forbidden paths. No positive sin is alleged against them. They were simply asleep. The other five were asleep too. I do not need to enter, here and now, into the whole interpretation of the parable, or there might be much to say about the difference between these two kinds of sleep. But what I wish to notice is that it was nothing except negligence darkening into drowsiness, which caused the dying out of the light.

It was not of set purpose that the foolish five took no oil with them. They merely neglected to do so, not having the wit to look ahead and provide against the contingency of a long time of waiting for the bridegroom. Their negligence was the result, not of deliberate wish to let their lights go out, but of their heedlessness; and because of that negligence they earned the name of 'foolish.' If we do not look forward, and prepare for possible drains on our powers, we shall deserve the same adjective. If we do not lay in stores for future use, we may be sent to school to the harvesting ant and the bee. That lesson applies to all departments of life; but it is eminently applicable

to the spiritual life, which is sustained only by communications from the Spirit of God. For these communications will be imperceptibly lessened, and may be altogether intercepted, unless diligent attention is given to keep open the channels by which they enter the spirit. If the pipes are not looked to, they will be choked by masses of matted trifles, through which the 'rivers of living water,' which Christ took as a symbol of the Spirit's influences, cannot force a way.

The thing that makes shipwreck of the faith of most professing Christians that do come to grief is no positive wickedness, no conduct which would be branded as sin by the Christian conscience or even by ordinary people, but simply torpor. If the water in a pond is never stirred, it is sure to stagnate, and green scum to spread over it, and a foul smell to rise from it. A Christian man has only to do what I am afraid a good many of us are in great danger of doing—that is, nothing—in order to ensure that his lamp shall go out.

Do you try to keep yours alight? There is only one way to do it—that is to go to Christ and get Him to pour His sweetness and His power into our open hearts. When one of the old patriarchs had committed a great sin, and had unbelievably twitched his hand out of God's hand, and gone away down into Egypt to help himself instead of trusting to God, he was commanded, on his return to Palestine, to go to the place where he dwelt at the first, and begin again, at the point where he began when he first entered the land. Which being translated is just this—the only way to keep our spirits vital and quick is by having recourse, again and again, to the same power which first imparted life to them, and this is done by the first means, the means of simple reliance upon Christ in the consciousness of our own

deep need, and of believingly waiting upon Him for the repeated communication of the gifts which we, alas! have so often misimproved. Negligence is enough to slay. Doing nothing is the sure way to quench the Holy Spirit.

And, on the other hand, keeping close to Him is the sure way to secure that He will never leave us. You can choke a lamp with oil, but you cannot have in your hearts too much of that divine grace. And you receive all that you need if you choose to go and ask it from Him. Remember the old story about Elisha and the poor woman. The cruse of oil began to run. She brought all the vessels that she could rake together, big and little, pots and cups, of all shapes and sizes, and set them, one after the other, under the jet of oil. They were all filled; and when she brought no more vessels the oil stayed. If you do not take your empty hearts to God, and say, 'Here, Lord, fill this cup too; poor as it is, fill it with Thine own gracious influences,' be very sure that no such influences will come to you. But if you do go, be as sure of this, that so long as you hold out your emptiness to Him, He will flood it with His fulness, and the light that seemed to be sputtering to its death will flame up again. He will not quench the smoking wick, if only we carry it to Him; but as the priests in the Temple walked all through the night to trim the golden lamps, so He who walks amidst the seven candlesticks will see to each.

IV. And now one last word. That process of gradual extinction may be going on, and may have been going on for a long while, and the virgin that carries the lamp be quite unaware of it.

How could a sleeping woman know whether her lamp was burning or not? How can a drowsy Christian

tell whether his spiritual life is bright or not? To be unconscious of our approximation to this condition is, I am afraid, one of the surest signs that we are in it. I suppose that a paralysed limb is quite comfortable. At any rate, paralysis of the spirit may be going on without our knowing anything about it. So, dear friends, do not put these poor words of mine away from you and say, 'Oh! they do not apply to me.'

I am quite sure that the people to whom they do apply will be the last people to take them to themselves. And while I quite believe, thank God! that there are many of us who may feel and know that our lamps are not going out, sure I am that there are some of us whom everybody but themselves knows to be carrying a lamp that is so far gone out that it is smoking and stinking in the eyes and noses of the people that stand by. Be sure that nobody was more surprised than were the five foolish women when they opened their witless, sleepy eyes, and saw the state of things. So, dear friends, 'let your loins be girt about, and your lamps burning; and ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their Lord.'

'THEY THAT WERE READY'

'They that were ready went in with him to the marriage.'—MATT. xxv. 10.

It is interesting to notice the variety of aspects in which, in this long discourse, Jesus sets forth His Second Coming. It is like the flood that swept away a world. It is like a thief stealing through the dark, and breaking up a house. It is like a master reckoning with his servants. These three metaphors suggest solemn,

one might almost say alarming, images. But then this parable comes in and tells how that coming is like that of a bridegroom to the bride's house, with joy and music. I am afraid that the average Christian, when he thinks at all of Christ's coming, takes these three first aspects rather than the last one, and so loses what is meant to be a bright hope and a great stimulus. It is not in human nature to think much about a terrible future. It is not in human nature to avoid thinking a great deal about a blessed future. And although one does not wish to preach carelessness, or the ignoring of the solemn side of that coming, sure I am that our Christian lives would be stronger and purer, brighter and better able to front the solemn side, if the blessed side of it were more often the object of our contemplation.

Turning to the words of my text, which seem to me to be the very centre and heart of this parable, I ask:—

I. What makes readiness?

There have been many answers given to that question. One has been that to be ready means to be perpetually having before us the thought of the coming of the Lord, and that has been taken to be the meaning of the watchfulness which is enjoined in the context. But the parable itself points in an altogether different direction. Who, according to it, were ready? The five who had lamps and oil. To have these was readiness.

It is beautiful to notice how these five who *were* ready when the Master came had 'slumbered and slept' like the other five. Ah! that touch in the picture shows that 'He knoweth our frame; He remembereth that we are dust.' It is not in human nature to keep up permanently a tension of expectation for a far-off good; and in profound knowledge of the weakness of

humanity, our Lord, in this parable, says: 'While the Bridegroom tarried they *all* slumbered'—and yet the five were ready when the Bridegroom came. In like manner, Christian men and women who have no expectation at all that the Second Coming of the Lord will occur during their lifetimes, may nevertheless be ready, if they have the burning lamps and the store of oil. The question then comes to be, What is meant by these?

Perhaps harm has been done by insisting upon too minute and specific interpretation. But, at the same time, we must not forget that, from the very beginning of the Jewish Revelation, from the time when the seven-branched candlestick was appointed for the Tabernacle, right down to the day when the Apocalyptic Seer saw in Patmos the Son of Man walking in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks, the metaphor has had one meaning. The aggregate of God's people are intended to be, as Jesus told us immediately after He had drawn the character of a true disciple, in the wonderful outlines of the Beatitudes, 'the light of the world,' and they will be so in the measure in which the gentle radiance of that character shines through their lives, as the light of a lamp through frosted glass. But the aggregate is made up of units, and individual Christians are to shine 'as lights in the world,' and their separate brightnesses are to coalesce in the clustered light of the whole Church. What makes an individual Christian a light is a Christ-like life, derived from that Life which was 'the Light of men.' The lamp which the five wise virgins bear is the same as the light which the consistent Christian is. The inner self illuminated from Christ, the source of all our illumination, lights up the outward life, which each of

us may be conceived as carrying in our hands. It is not ourselves, and yet it is ourselves made visible. It is not ourselves, but Christ in us; and so we shine as lights in the world, only by 'holding forth the word of life.'

That modification of the figure by Paul is profoundly true and important, for after all we are not so much lights as candelabra, and only as we bear aloft the flashing light of Christ shall we shine 'in a naughty world.' Our lamps, then, are Christ-like characters derived from Christ, and to have and bear these is the first element in being ready for the Bridegroom.

Dear friends, remember that this whole parable is spoken to professing Christians and real members of Christ's Church; and that there is no meaning in it unless it is possible to quench the light of the lamp. Remember that our Lord said once, 'Let your loins be girt,' and put that as the necessary condition of lamps burning. 'Let your loins be girt' with resolved effort of faith and dependence, and make sure that you have the provision for the continuance of the light. So, and only so, shall any man be of the happy company of them that were ready.

II. Note that this readiness is the condition of entrance.

'They that were ready went in with Him to the marriage.' Now faith alone unites a man to Jesus Christ, and makes him an heir of salvation. But faith alone, if that were possible, would not admit a man to the marriage-feast. Of course the supposed case is an impossible case, for as James has taught us in his plain moral way, faith which is alone dies, or perhaps never lived. But what our Lord tells us here is that moral character, which is of such a sort as to shine in the world's

darkness, is the condition of entrance. People say that salvation is by faith. Yes, that is true; but salvation is by works also, only that the works are made possible through faith. In the very necessity and nature of things nothing but the readiness which consists in continued Christ-like character will ever allow a man to pass the threshold. Now do you believe that? Or are you saying, 'I trust to Jesus Christ, and so I am sure I shall go to Heaven.' No, you will not, unless your faith is making you heavenly, in your temper and conduct. For to talk about the next world as a place of retribution is but an imperfect statement of the case. It is not a place of retribution so much as of outcome, and the apostle gives a completer view when he says, 'Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.' That future life is not the reward of goodness so much as the necessary consequence of holiness. Holiness and blessedness are, in some measure, separated here; there they are two names for the one condition. 'No man shall see the Lord,' without that holiness. 'They that were ready went in.' Of course they did. Am I ready? That question means, Am I, by my faith in Jesus Christ, receiving into my heart the anointing which that great anointed One gives us? Am I living a life that is a light in the world? If so, and not else, my entrance is sure.

We have seen what this readiness consists in, and how it is the condition of entrance. There is one last thought—

III. To delay preparation is madness.

There is nothing in all Christ's parables more tragical, more pathetic, than this picture of the hapless five when they woke up to find their lamps going out. They heard the procession coming, the sound of feet

drawing nearer, and the music borne every moment more loudly on the midnight air. And there were they, with dying lamps and empty oil-cans. Their shock, their alarm, their bewilderment, are all expressed in that preposterous request of theirs, 'Give us of your oil.'

The answer of the wise virgins has been said to be cold and unfeeling. It is not that; it is simply a plain statement of facts. The oil that belongs to me cannot be given to you. That is the first lesson taught us by the request of the foolish and the answer of the wise. 'If thou be wise, thou shalt be wise for thyself; and if thou scornest, thou alone shalt bear it.' 'Every man shall bear his own burden.' There is no possible transference of moral character or spiritual gifts in that fashion. The awful individuality of each soul, and its unshareable personal responsibility, come solemnly to view in the words which superficial readers pass by: 'Not so, lest there be not enough for us and you.' You cannot share your brother's oil. You may share many of his possessions; not this.

'Go to them that sell, and buy for yourselves.' The question of whether there was time to buy was not for the five wise to answer. There was not much chance that the would-be buyers would find a shop open and anybody waiting to sell them oil at twelve o'clock at night. But they risked it; and when they came back they were too late.

Now, dear friends, all the lessons of this parable may be taken by us, though we do not believe, and think we have good reason for not believing, that the literal return of Jesus Christ is to take place in our time. It does not matter very much, in so far as the teaching of this parable is concerned, whether the Bridegroom comes to us, or whether we go to the Bridegroom. I

do not for a moment say that there is no such thing as coming to Jesus Christ in the last hours of life, and becoming ready to enter even then, but I do say that it is a very rare case, and that there is a terrible risk in delaying till then. But I pray you to remember that our parable is addressed to, and contemplates the case of, not people who are away from Jesus Christ, but Christians, and that it is to them that its message is chiefly brought. It is they whom it warns not to put off making sure that they have provision for the continuance of the Christ-life. We have, day by day, to go to Him that sells and 'buy for ourselves.' And we know, what it did not fall within our Lord's purpose to say in this parable, that the price of the oil is the surrender of ourselves, and the opening of our hearts to the entrance of that divine Spirit. Then there will be no fear but that the lamp will hold out to burn, and no fear but that 'when the Bridegroom, with His feastful friends, passes to bliss, at the mid-hour of night,' we shall gain our entrance.

TRADERS FOR THE MASTER

'For the kingdom of heaven is as a man travelling into a far country, who called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods. 15. And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one; to every man according to his several ability; and straightway took his journey. 16. Then he that had received the five talents went and traded with the same, and made them other five talents. 17. And likewise he that had received two, he also gained other two. 18. But he that had received one went and digged in the earth, and hid his lord's money. 19. After a long time the lord of those servants cometh, and reckoneth with them. 20. And so he that had received five talents came and brought other five talents, saying, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me five talents: behold, I have gained beside them five talents more. 21. His lord said unto him, Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord. 22. He also that had received two talents came and said, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me two talents: behold, I have gained two other talents beside them. 23. His lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord. 24. Then he which had received the one talent came and said, Lord, I knew thee that thou

art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed : 25. And I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth : lo, there thou hast that is thine. 26. His lord answered and said unto him, Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I have not strawed : 27. Thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury. 28. Take therefore the talent from him, and give it unto him which hath ten talents. 29. For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance : but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath. 30. And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness : there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'—MATT. XXV. 14-30.

THE parable of the Ten Virgins said nothing about their working whilst they waited. This one sets forth that side of the duties of the servants in their master's absence, and so completes the former. It is clearly in its true historical connection here, and is closely knit to both the preceding and following context. It is a strange instance of superficial reading that it should ever have been supposed to be but another version of Luke's parable of the pounds. The very resemblances of the two are meant to give force to their differences, which are fundamental. They are the converse of each other. That of the pounds teaches that men who have the same gifts intrusted to them may make a widely different use of these, and will be rewarded differently, in strictly graduated proportion to their unlike diligence. The lesson of the parable before us, on the other hand, is that men with dissimilar gifts may employ them with equal diligence ; and that, if they do, their reward shall be the same, however great the endowments of one, and slender those of another. A reader who has missed that distinction must be very shortsighted, or sworn to make out a case against the Gospels.

I. We may consider the lent capital and the business done with it.

Masters nowadays do not give servants their money to trade with, when they leave home ; but the in-

cident is true to the old-world relations of master and slave. Our Lord's consciousness of His near departure, which throbs in all this context, comes out emphatically here. He is preparing His disciples for the time when they will have to work without Him, like the managers of some branch house of business whose principal has gone abroad. What are the 'talents' with which He will start them on their own account? We have taken the word into common language, however little we remember the teaching of the parable as to the hand that gives 'men of talent' their endowments. But the natural powers usually called by the name are not what Christ means here, though the principles of the parable may be extended to include them. For these powers are the 'ability' according to which the talents are given. But the talents themselves are the spiritual knowledge and endowments which are properly the gifts of the ascended Lord to His Church. Two important lessons as to these are conveyed. First, that they are distributed in varying measure, and that not arbitrarily, by the mere will of the giver, but according to his discernment of what each servant can profitably administer. The 'ability' which settles their amount is not more closely defined. It may include natural faculty, for Christ's gifts usually follow the line of that; and the larger the nature, the more of Him it can contain. But it also includes spiritual receptiveness and faithfulness, which increase the absorbing power. The capacity to receive will also be the capacity to administer, and it will be fully filled.

The second lesson taught is that spiritual gifts are given for trading with. In other words, they are here considered not so much as blessings to the pos-

essor as his stock-in-trade, which he can employ for the Master's enrichment. We are all tempted to think of them mostly as given us for our own blessing and joy; and the reminder is never unseasonable that a Christian receives nothing for himself alone. God hath shined into our hearts, that we may give to others the light of the knowledge which has flashed glad day into our darkness. The Master intrusts us with a portion of His wealth, not for expending on ourselves, but for trading with.

A third principle here is that the right use of His gifts increases them in our hands. 'Money makes money.' The five talents grow to ten, the two to four. The surest way to increase our possession of Christ's grace is to try to impart it. There is no better way of strengthening our own faith than to seek to make others share in it. Christian convictions, spoken, are confirmed, but muffled in silence are weakened. 'There is that scattereth and yet increaseth.' Seed heaped and locked up in a granary breeds weevils and moths; flung broadcast over the furrows, it multiplies into seed that can be sown again, and bread that feeds the sower. So we have in this part of the parable almost the complete summary of the principles on which, the purposes for which, and the results to faithful use with which, Christ gives His gifts.

The conduct of the slenderly endowed servant who hides his talent will be considered farther on.

II. We note the faithful servants' balance-sheet and reward.

Our Lord again sounds the note of delay—'After a long time'—an indefinite phrase which we know carries centuries in its folds, how many more we know not, nor are intended to know. The two faithful

servants present their balance-sheet in identical words, and receive the same commendation and reward. Their speech is in sharp contrast with the idle one's excuse, inasmuch as it puts a glad acknowledgment of the lord's giving in the forefront, as if to teach that the thankful recognition of his liberality underlies all joyful and successful service, and deepens while it makes glad the sense of responsibility. The cords of love are silken; and he who begins with setting before himself the largeness of Christ's gifts to him, will not fail in using these so as to increase them. In the light of that day, the servant sees more clearly than when he was at work the results of his work. We do not know what the year's profits have been till stock-taking and balancing-time comes. Here we often say, 'I have laboured in vain.' There we shall say, 'I have gained five talents.'

The verbatim repetition of the same words to both servants teaches the great lesson of this parable as contrasted with that of the pounds, that where there has been the same faithful work, with different amounts of capital, there will be the same reward. Our Master does not care about quantity, but about quality and motive. The slave with a few shillings, enough to stock meagrely a little stall, may show as much business capacity, diligence, and fidelity, as if he had millions to work with. Christ rewards not actions, but the graces which are made visible in actions; and these can be as well seen in the tiniest as in the largest deeds. The light that streams through a pin-prick is the same that pours through the widest window. The crystals of a salt present the same facets, flashing back the sun at the same angles, whether they be large or microscopically small. Therefore the

judgment of Christ, which is simply the utterance of fact, takes no heed of the extent but only of the kind of service, and puts on the same level of recompense all who, with however widely varying powers, were one in spirit, in diligence, and devotion. The eulogium on the servants is not 'successful' or 'brilliant,' but 'faithful,' and both alike get it.

The words of the lord fall into three parts. First comes his generous and hearty praise,—the brief and emphatic monosyllable 'Well,' and the characterisation of the servants as 'good and faithful.' Praise from Christ's lips is praise indeed; and here He pours it out in no grudging or scanty measure, but with warmth and evident delight. His heart glows with pleasure, and His commendation is musical with the utterance of His own joy in His servants. He 'rejoices over them with singing'; and more gladly than a fond mother speaks honeyed words of approval to her darling, of whose goodness she is proud, does He praise these two. When we are tempted to disparage our slender powers as compared with those of His more conspicuous servants, and to suppose that all which we do is nought, let us think of this merciful and loving estimate of our poor service. For such words from such lips, life itself were wisely flung away; but such words from such lips will be spoken in recognition of many a piece of service less high and heroic than a martyr's. 'Good and faithful' refers not to the more general notion of goodness, but to the special excellence of a servant, and the latter word seems to define the former. Fidelity is the grace which He praises,—manifested in the recognition that the capital was a loan, given to be traded with for Him, and to be brought back increased to Him. He is faithful who ever keeps in view, and acts on, the

conditions on which, and the purposes for which, he has received his spiritual wealth; and 'he who is faithful in that which is least, is faithful also in much.'

The second part of the lord's words is the appointment to higher office, as the reward of faithfulness. Here on earth, the tools come, in the long run, to the hands that can use them, and the best reward of faithfulness in a narrower sphere is to be lifted to a wider. Promotion means more to do; and if the world were rightly organised, the road to advancement would be diligence; and the higher a man climbed, the wider would be the horizon of his labour. It is so in Christ's kingdom, and should be so in His visible Church. It will be so in heaven. Clearly this saying implies the active theory of the future life, and the continuance in some ministry of love, unknown to us, of the energies which were trained in the small transactions of earth. 'If five talents are "a few things," how great the "many things" will be!' In the parable of the pounds, the servant is made a ruler; here being 'set over' seems rather still to point to the place of a steward or servant. The sphere is enlarged, but the office is unaltered. The manager who conducted a small trade rightly will be advanced to the superintendence of a larger business.

' We doubt not that for one so true
There must be other, nobler work to do,'

and that in that work the same law will continue to operate, and faithfulness be crowned with ever-growing capacities and tasks through a dateless eternity.

The last words of the lord pass beyond our poor attempts at commenting. No eye can look undazzled at the sun. When Christ was near the Cross, He left

His disciples a strange bequest at such a moment,—His joy; and that is their brightest portion here, even though it be shaded with many sorrows. The enthroned Christ welcomes all who have known ‘the fellowship of His sufferings’ into the fulness of His heavenly joy, unshaded, unbroken, unspeakable; and they pass into it as into an encompassing atmosphere, or some broad land of peace and abundance. Sympathy with His purposes leads to such oneness with Him that His joy is ours, both in its occasions and in its rapture. ‘Thou makest them drink of the river of Thy pleasures,’ and the lord and the servant drink from the same cup.

III. The excuse and punishment of the indolent servant.

His excuse is his reason. He did think hardly of his lord, and, even though he had His gift in his hand to confute him, he slandered Him in his heart as harsh and exacting. To many men the requirements of religion are more prominent than its gifts, and God is thought of as demanding rather than as ‘the giving God.’ Such thoughts paralyse action. Fear is barren, love is fruitful. Nothing grows on the mountain of curses, which frowns black over against the sunny slopes of the mountain of blessing with its blushing grapes. The indolence was illogical, for, if the master was such as was thought, the more reason for diligence; but fear is a bad reasoner, and the absurd gap between the premises and the conclusion is matched by one of the very same width in every life that thinks of God as rigidly requiring obedience, which, therefore, it does *not* give! Still another error is in the indolent servant’s words. He flings down the hoarded talent with ‘Lo, thou hast thine own.’ He was mistaken. Talents hid are not, when dug up, as heavy as they were when buried. This

gold does rust, and a life not devoted to God is never carried back to Him unspoiled.

The lord's answer again falls into three parts, corresponding to that to the faithful servants. First comes the stern characterisation of the man. As with the others' goodness, his badness is defined by the second epithet. It is slothfulness. Is that all? Yes; it does not need active opposition to pull down destruction on one's head. Simple indolence is enough, the negative sin of not doing or being what we ought. Ungirt loins, unlit lamps, unused talents, sink a man like lead. Doing nothing is enough for ruin.

The remarkable answer to the servant's charge seems to teach us that timid souls, conscious of slender endowments, and pressed by the heavy sense of responsibility, and shrinking from Christian enterprises, for fear of incurring heavier condemnation, may yet find means of using their little capital. The bankers, who invest the collective contributions of small capitalists to advantage, may, or may not, be intended to be translated into the Church; but, at any rate, the principle of united service is here recommended to those who feel too weak for independent action. Slim houses in a row hold each other up; and, if we cannot strike out a path for ourselves, let us seek strength and safety in numbers.

The fate of the indolent servant has a double horror. It is loss and suffering. The talent is taken from the slack hands and coward heart that would not use it, and given to the man who had shown he could and would. Gifts unemployed for Christ are stripped off a soul yonder. How much will go from many a richly endowed spirit, which here flashed with unconsecrated genius and force! We do not need to wait for eternity

to see that true possession, which is use, increases powers, and that disuse, which is equivalent to not possessing, robs of them. The blacksmith's arm, the scout's eye, the craftsman's delicate finger, the student's intellect, the sensualist's passions, all illustrate the law on its one side; and the dying out of faculties and tastes, and even of intuitions and conscience, by reason of simple disuse, are melancholy instances of it on the other. But the solemn words of this condemnation seem to point to a far more awful energy in its working in the future, when everything that has not been consecrated by employment for Jesus shall be taken away, and the soul, stripped of its garb, shall 'be found naked.' How far that process of divesting may affect faculties, without touching the life, who can tell? Enough to see with awe that a spirit may be cut, as it were, to the quick, and still exist.

But loss is not all the indolent servant's doom. Once more, like the slow toll of a funeral bell, we hear the dread sentence of ejection to the 'mirk midnight' without, where are tears undried and passion unavailing. There is something very awful in the monotonous repetition of that sentence so often in these last discourses of Christ's. The most loving lips that ever spoke, in love, shaped this form of words, so heart-touching in its wailing, but decisive, proclamation of blackness, homelessness, and sorrow, and cannot but toll them over and over again into our ears, in sad knowledge of our forgetfulness and unbelief,—if perchance we may listen and be warned, and, having heard the sound thereof, may never know the reality of that death in life which is the sure end of the indolent who were blind to His gifts, and therefore would not listen to His requirements.

WHY THE TALENT WAS BURIED

'Then he which had received the one talent came and said, Lord, I knew thee that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed: 25. And I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth.'—MATT. XXV. 24, 25.

THAT was a strangely insolent excuse for indolence. To charge an angry master to his face with grasping greed and injustice was certainly not the way to conciliate him. Such language is quite unnatural and incongruous until we remember the reality which the parable was meant to shadow—viz., the answers for their deeds which men will give at Christ's judgment bar. Then we can understand how, by some irresistible necessity, this man was compelled, even at the risk of increasing the indignation of the master, to turn himself inside out, and to put into harsh, ugly words the half-conscious thoughts which had guided his life and caused his unfaithfulness. 'Every one of us shall give account of himself to God.' The unabashed impudence of such an excuse for idleness as this is but putting into vivid and impressive form this truth, that then a man's actions in their true character, and the ugly motives that underlie them, and which he did not always honestly confess to himself, will be clear before him. It will be as much of a surprise to the men themselves, in many cases, as it could be to listeners. Thus it becomes us to look well to the under side of our lives, the unspoken convictions and the unformulated motives which work all the more mightily upon us because, for the most part, they work in the dark. This is Christ's explanation of one very operative and fruitful cause of the refusal to serve Him.

I. I ask you, then, to consider, first, the slander here and the truth that contradicts it.

‘I knew thee that thou art an hard man,’ says he, ‘reaping where thou hast not sown’ (and he was standing with the unused talent in his hand all the while), ‘and gathering where thou hast not strawed.’ That is to say, deep down in many a heart that has never said as much to itself, there lies this black drop of gall—a conception of the divine character rather as demanding than as giving, a thought of Him as exacting. What He requires is more considered than what He bestows. So religion is thought to be mainly a matter of doing certain things and rendering up certain sacrifices, instead of being regarded, as it really is, as mainly a matter of receiving from God. Christ’s authority makes me bold to say that this error underlies the lives of an immense number of nominal Christians, of people who think themselves very good and religious, as well as the lives of thousands who stand apart from religion altogether. And I want, not to drag down any curtain by my own hand, but to ask you to lift away the veil which hides the ugly thing in your hearts, and to put your own consciousness to the bar of your own conscience, and say whether it is not true that the uppermost thought about God, when you think about Him at all, is, ‘Thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown.’

It is not difficult to understand why such a thought of God should rise in a heart which has no delight in Him nor in His service. There is a side of the truth as to God’s relations to man which gives a colour of plausibility to the slander. Grave and stringent requirements are made by the divine law upon each of us; and our consciences tell us that they have not been kept. Therefore we seek to persuade ourselves that they are too severe. Then, further, we are, by reason of our own selfishness, almost incapable of rising to

the conception of God's pure, perfect, disinterested love; and we are far too blind to the benefits that He pours upon us all every day of our lives. And so from all these reasons taken together, and some more besides, it comes about that, for some of us, the blessed sun in the heavens, the God of all mercy and love, has been darkened into a lurid orb shorn of all its beneficent beams, and hangs threatening there in our misty sky. 'I knew Thee that Thou art an hard man.' Ah! I am sure that if we would go down into the deep places of our own hearts, and ask ourselves what our real thought of God is, many of us would acknowledge that it is something like that.

Now turn to the other side. What is the truth that smites this slander to death? That God is perfect, pure, unmingled, infinite love. And what is love? The infinite desire to impart itself. His 'nature and property' is to be merciful, and you can no more stop God from giving than you can shut up the rays of the sun within itself. To be and to bestow are for Him one and the same thing. His love is an infinite longing to give, which passes over into perpetual acts of beneficence. He never reaps where He has not sown. Is there any place where He has not sown? Is there any heart on which there have been no seeds of goodness scattered from His rich hand? The calumniator in the text was speaking his slanders with that in his hand which should have stopped his mouth. He who complained that the hard master was asking for fruit of what He had not given would have had nothing at all, if he had not obtained the one talent from His hand. And there is no place in the whole wide universe of God where His love has not scattered its beneficent gifts. There are no fallow

fields out of cultivation and unsown, in His great farm. He never asks where He has not given.

He never asks until after He has given. He begins with bestowing, and it is only after the vineyard has been planted on the very fruitful hill, and the hedge built round about it, and the winepress digged, and the tower erected, and miracles of long-suffering mercy and skilful patience have been lavished upon it, that then He looks that it should bring forth grapes. God's gifts precede His requirements. He ever sows before He reaps. More than that, He gives *what* He asks, helping us to render to Him the hearts that He desires. He, by His own merciful communications, makes it possible that we should lay at His feet the tribute of loving thanks. Just as a parent will give a child some money in order that the child may go and buy the giver a birthday present, so God gives to us hearts, and enriches them with many bestowments. He scatters round about us good from His hand, like drops of a fragrant perfume from a blazing torch, in order that we may catch them up and have some portion of the joy which is especially His own—the joy of giving. It would be a poor affair if our sole relation to God were that of receiving. It would be a tyrannous affair if our sole relation to God were that of rendering up. But both relations are united, and if it be 'more blessed to give than to receive,' the Giver of all good does not leave us without the opportunity of entering in even to that superlative blessing. We have to come to Him and say, when we lay the gifts, either of our faculties or of our trust, of our riches or of our virtues, at His feet, 'All things come of Thee, and of Thine own have we given Thee.'

He asks for our sakes, and not for His own. 'If I

were hungry I would not tell thee, for the cattle upon a thousand hills are Mine. Offer unto God praise, and pay thy vows unto the Most High.' It is blessed to us to render. He is none the richer for all our giving, as He is none the poorer for all His. Yet His giving to us is real, and our giving is real and a joy to Him. That is the truth lifted up against the slander of the natural heart. God is love, pure giving, unlimited and perpetual disposition to bestow. He gives all things before He asks for anything, and when He asks for anything it is that we may be blessed.

But you say, 'That is all very well—where do you learn all that about God?' My answer is a very simple one. I learn it, and I believe there is no other place to learn it, at the Cross of Jesus Christ. If that be the very apex of the divine love and self-revelation; if, looking upon it, we understand God better than by any other means, then there can be no question but that instead of gathering where He has not strawed, and reaping where He has not sown, God is only, and always, and utterly, and to every man, infinite love that bestows itself. My heart says to me many a time, 'God's laws are hard, God's judgment is strict. God requires what you cannot give. Crouch before Him, and be afraid.' And my faith says, 'Get thee behind me, Satan!' 'He that spared not His own Son, . . . how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?' The Cross of Christ is the answer to the slander, and the revelation of the giving God.

II. Secondly, mark here the fear that dogs such a thought, and the love that casts out the fear.

'I was afraid.' Yes, of course. If a man is not a fool, his emotions follow his thoughts, and his thoughts ought to shape his emotions. And wherever there is

the twilight of uncertainty upon the great lesson that the Cross of Jesus Christ has taught us, *there* there will be, however masked and however modified by other thoughts, deep in the human heart, a perhaps unspoken, but not therefore ineffectual, dread of God. Just as the misconception of the divine character does influence many a life in which it has never been spoken articulately, and needs some steady observation of ourselves to be detected, so is it with this dread of Him. Carry the task of self-examination a little further, and ask yourselves whether there does not lie coiled in many of your hearts this dread of God, like a sleeping snake, which only needs a little warmth to be awakened to sting. There are all the signs of it. There are many of you who have a distinct indisposition to be brought close up to the thought of Him. There are many of you who have a distinct sense of discomfort when you are pressed against the realities of the Christian religion. There are many of you who, though you cover it over with a shallow confidence, or endeavour to persuade yourselves into speculative doubts about the divine nature, or hide it from yourselves by indifference, yet know that all that is very thin ice, and that there is a great black pool down below—a dread at the heart, of a righteous Judge somewhere, with whom you have somewhat to do, that you cannot shake off. I do not want to appeal to fear, but it goes to one's heart to see the hundreds and thousands of people round about us who, just because they are afraid of God, will not think about Him, put away angrily and impatiently solemn words like these that I am trying to speak, and seek to surround themselves with some kind of a fool's paradise of indifference, and to shut their eyes to facts and realities. You do not confess it

to yourselves. What kind of a thought must that be about your relation to God which you are afraid to speak? Some of you remember the awful words in one of Shakespeare's plays: 'Now I, to comfort him, bid him he should not think of God. I hoped there was no need to trouble himself with any such thoughts yet.' What does that teach us? 'I knew Thee that Thou art an hard man; and I was afraid.'

Dear friend, there are two religions in this world: there is the religion of fear, and there is the religion of love; and if you have not the one, you must have the other, if you have any at all. The only way to get perfect love that casts out fear is to be quite sure of the Father-love in heaven that begets it. And the only way to be sure of the infinite love in the heavens that kindles some little spark of love in our hearts here, is to go to Christ and learn the lesson that He reveals to us at His Cross. Love will annihilate the fear; or rather, if I may take such a figure, will set a light to the wreathing smoke that rises, and flash it all up into a ruddy flame. For the perfect love that casts out fear sublimates it into reverence and changes it into trust. Have you got that love, and did you get it at Christ's Cross?

III. Lastly, mark the torpor of fear and the activity of love. 'I was afraid, and I went and hid thy talent in the earth.'

Fear paralyzes service, cuts the nerve of activity, makes a man refuse obedience to God. It was a very illogical thing of that indolent servant to say, 'I knew that you were so hard in exacting what was due to you that therefore I determined *not* to give it to you.' Is it more illogical and more absurd than what hundreds of men and women round about us do to-day, when they

say, 'God's requirements are so great that I do *not* attempt to fulfil them'? One would have thought that he would have reasoned the other way, and said, 'Because I knew that Thy requirements were so great and severe, therefore I put myself with all my powers to my work.' Not so. Logical or illogical, the result remains, that that thought of God, that black drop of gall, in many a heart, stops the action of the hand. Fear is barren, or if it produces anything it is nothing to the purpose, and it brings gifts that not even God's love can accept, for there is no love in them. Fear is barren; Love is fruitful—like the two mountains of Samaria, from one of which the rolling burden of the curses of the Law was thundered, and from the other of which the sweet words of promise and of blessing were chanted in musical response. On the one side are black rocks, without a blade of grass on them, the Mount of Cursing; on the other side are blushing grapes and vineyards, the Mount of Blessing. Love moves to action, fear paralyses into indolence. And the reason why such hosts of you do nothing for God is because your hearts have never been touched with the thorough conviction that He has done everything for you, and asks you but to love Him back again, and bring Him your hearts. These dark thoughts are like the frost which binds the ground in iron fetters, making all the little flowers that were beginning to push their heads into the light shrink back again. And love, when it comes, will come like the west wind and the sunshine of the Spring; and before its emancipating fingers the earth's fetters will be cast aside, and the white snowdrops and the yellow crocuses will show themselves above the ground. If you want your hearts to bear any fruit of noble living, and holy consecration,

and pure deeds, then here is the process—Begin with the knowledge and belief of ‘the love which God hath to us’; learn that at the Cross, and let it silence your doubts, and send them back to their kennels, silenced. Then take the next step, and love Him back again. ‘We love Him because He first loved us.’ That love will be the productive principle of all glad obedience, and you will keep His commandments, and here upon earth find, as the faithful servant found, that talents used increase; and yonder will receive the eulogium from His lips whom to please is blessedness, by whom to be praised is heaven’s glory, ‘Well done! good and faithful servant.’

THE KING ON HIS JUDGMENT THRONE

‘When the Son of Man shall come in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then shall He sit upon the throne of His glory: 32. And before Him shall be gathered all nations: and He shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: 33. And He shall set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. 34. Then shall the King say unto them on His right hand, Come, ye blessed of My Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: 35. For I was an hungred, and ye gave Me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave Me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took Me in: 36. Naked, and ye clothed Me: I was sick, and ye visited Me: I was in prison, and ye came unto Me. 37. Then shall the righteous answer Him, saying, Lord, when saw we Thee an hungred, and fed Thee? or thirsty, and gave Thee drink? 38. When saw we Thee a stranger, and took Thee in? or naked, and clothed Thee? 39. Or when saw we Thee sick, or in prison, and came unto Thee? 40. And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me. 41. Then shall He say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from Me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: 42. For I was an hungred, and ye gave Me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave Me no drink: 43. I was a stranger, and ye took Me not in: naked, and ye clothed Me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited Me not. 44. Then shall they also answer Him, saying, Lord, when saw we Thee an hungred, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto Thee? 45. Then shall He answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to Me. 46. And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.’—MATT. xxv. 31-46.

THE teachings of that wonderful last day of Christ’s ministry, which have occupied so many of our pages, are closed with this tremendous picture of universal

judgment. It is one to be gazed upon with silent awe, rather than to be commented on. There is fear lest, in occupying the mind in the study of the details, and trying to pierce the mystery it partly unfolds, we should forget our own individual share in it. Better to burn in on our hearts the thought, 'I shall be there,' than to lose the solemn impression in efforts to unravel the difficulties of the passage. Difficulties there are, as is to be expected in even Christ's revelation of so unparalleled a scene. Many questions are raised by it which will never be solved till we stand there. Who can tell how much of the parabolic element enters into the description? We, at all events, do not venture to say of one part, 'This is merely drapery, the sensuous representation of spiritual reality,' and of another, 'That is essential truth.' The curtain is the picture, and before we can separate the elements of it in that fashion, we must have lived through it. Let us try to grasp the main lessons, and not lose the spirit in studying the letter.

I. The first broad teaching is that Christ is the Judge of all the earth. Sitting there, a wearied man on the Mount of Olives, with the valley of Jehoshaphat at His feet, which the Jew regarded as the scene of the final judgment, Jesus declared Himself to be the Judge of the world, in language so unlimited in its claims that the speaker must be either a madman or a god. Calvary was less than three days off, when He spoke thus. The contrast between the vision of the future and the reality of the present is overwhelming. The Son of Man has come in weakness and shame; He will come in His glory, that flashing light of the self-revealing God, of which the symbol was the 'glory' which shone between the cherubim, and which Jesus Christ here

asserts to belong to Him as '*His* glory.' Then, heaven will be emptied of its angels, who shall gather round the enthroned Judge as His handful of sorrowing followers were clustered round Him as He spoke, or as the peasants had surrounded the meek state of His entry yesterday. Then, He will take the place of Judge, and 'sit,' in token of repose, supremacy, and judgment, 'on the throne of His glory,' as He now sat on the rocks of Olivet. Then, mankind shall be massed at His feet, and His glance shall part the infinite multitudes, and discern the character of each item in the crowd as easily and swiftly as the shepherd's eye picks out the black goats from among the white sheep. Observe the difference in the representation from those in the previous parables. There, the parting of kinds was either self-acting, as in the case of the foolish maidens; or men gave account of *themselves*, as in the case of the servants with the talents. Here, the separation is the work of the Judge, and is completed before a word is spoken. All these representations must be included in the complete truth as to the final judgment. It is the effect of men's actions; it is the result of their compelled disclosing of the deepest motives of their lives; it is the act of the perfect discernment of the Judge. Their deeds will judge them; they will judge themselves; Christ will judge.

Singularly enough, every possible interpretation of the extent of the expression 'all nations' has found advocates. It has been taken in its widest and plainest meaning, as equivalent to the whole race; it has been confined to mankind exclusive of Christians, and it has been confined to Christians exclusive of heathens. There are difficulties in all these explanations, but probably the least are found in the first. It is most natural to suppose

that 'all nations' means all nations, unless that meaning be impossible. The absence of the limitation to the 'kingdom of heaven,' which distinguishes this section from the preceding ones having reference to judgment, and the position of the present section as the solemn close of Christ's teachings, which would naturally widen out into the declaration of the universal judgment, which forms the only appropriate climax and end to the foregoing teachings, seem to point to the widest meaning of the phrase. His office of universal Judge is unmistakably taught throughout the New Testament, and it seems in the highest degree unnatural to suppose that He did not speak of it in these final words of prophetic warning. We may therefore, with some confidence, see in the magnificent and awful picture here drawn the vision of universal judgment. Parabolic elements there no doubt are in the picture; but we have no governing revelation, free from these, by which we can check them, and be sure of how much is form and how much substance. This is clear, 'that we must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ'; and this is clear, that Jesus Christ put forth, when at the very lowest point of His earthly humiliation, these tremendous claims, and asserted His authority as Judge over every soul of man. We are apt to lose ourselves in the crowd. Let us pause and think that 'all' includes 'me.'

II. Note the principles of Christ's universal judgment. It is important to remember that this section closes a series of descriptions of the judgment, and must not be taken as if, when isolated, it set forth all the truth. It is often harped upon by persons who are unfriendly to evangelical teaching, as if it were Christ's only word about judgment, and interpreted as if it meant that,

no matter what else a man was, if only he is charitable and benevolent, he will find mercy. But this is to forget all the rest of our Lord's teaching in the context, and to fly in the face of the whole tenor of New Testament doctrine. We have here to do with the principles of judgment which apply equally to those who have, and to those who have not, heard the gospel. The subjects of the kingdom are shown the principles more immediately applicable to them, in the previous parables, and here they are reminded that there is a standard of judgment absolutely universal. All men, whether Christians or not, are judged by 'the things done in the body, whether they be good or bad.' So Christ teaches in His closing words of the Sermon on the Mount, and in many another place. 'Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.' The productive source of good works is not in question here; stress is laid on the fruits, rather than on the root. The gospel is as imperative in its requirements of righteousness as the law is, and its conception of the righteousness which it requires is far deeper and wider. The subjects of the kingdom ever need to be reminded of the solemn truth that they have not only, like the wise maidens, to have their lights burning and their oil vessels filled, nor only, like the wise servants, to be using the gifts of the kingdom for their lord, but, as members of the great family of man, have to cultivate the common moralities which all men, heathen and Christian, recognise as binding on all, without which no man shall see the Lord. The special form of righteousness which is selected as the test is charity. Obviously it is chosen as representative of all the virtues of the second table of the law. Taken in its bare literality, this would mean that men's relations

to God had no effect in the judgment, and that no other virtues but this of charity came into the account. Such a conclusion is so plainly repugnant to all Christ's teaching, that we must suppose that love to one's neighbour is here singled out, just as it is in His summary of 'the law and the prophets,' as the crown and flower of all relative duties, and as, in a very real sense, being 'the fulfilling of the law.' The omission of any reference to the love of God sufficiently shows that the view here is rigidly limited to acts, and that all the grounds of judgment are not meant to be set forth.

But the benevolence here spoken of is not the mere natural sentiment, which often exists in great energy in men whose moral nature is, in other respects, so utterly un-Christlike that their entrance into the kingdom prepared for the righteous is inconceivable. Many a man has a hundred vices and yet a soft heart. It is very much a matter of temperament. Does Christ so contradict all the rest of His teaching as to say that such a man is of 'the sheep,' and 'blessed of the Father'? Surely not. Is every piece of kindness to the distressed, from whatever motive, and by whatsoever kind of person done, regarded by Him as done to Himself? To say so, would be to confound moral distinctions, and to dissolve all righteousness into a sentimental syrup. The deeds which He regards as done to Himself, are done to His 'brethren.' That expression carries us into the region of motive, and runs parallel with His other words about 'receiving a prophet,' and 'giving a cup of cold water to one of these little ones,' because they are His. Seeing that all nations are at the bar, the expression, 'My brethren,' cannot be confined to the disciples, for many of those who are being judged have never come in contact with Christians,

nor can it be reasonably supposed to include all men, for, however true it is that Christ is every man's brother, the recognition of kindred here must surely be confined to those at the right hand. Whatever be included under the 'righteous,' that is included under the 'brethren.' We seem, then, led to recognise in the expression a reference to the motive of the beneficence, and to be brought to the conclusion that what the Judge accepts as done to Himself is such kindly help and sympathy as is extended to these His kindred, with some recognition of their character, and desire after it. To 'receive a prophet' implies that there is some spiritual affinity with him in the receiver. To give help to His brethren, because they are so, implies some affinity with Him or feeling after likeness to Him and them. Now, if we hold fast by the universality of the judgment here depicted, we shall see that this recognition must necessarily have different degrees in those who have heard of Christ and in those who have not. In the former, it will be equivalent to that faith which is the root of all goodness, and grasps the Christ revealed in the gospel. In the latter, it can be no more than a feeling after Him who is the 'light that lighteneth every man that cometh into the world.' Surely there are souls amid the darkness of heathenism yearning toward the light, like plants grown in the dark. By ways of His own, Christ can reach such hearts, as the river of the water of life may percolate through underground channels to many a tree which grows far from its banks.

III. Note the surprises of the judgment. The astonishment of the righteous is not modesty disclaiming praise, but real wonder at the undreamed-of significance of their deeds. In the parable of the talents,

the servants unveiled their inmost hearts, and accurately described their lives. Here, the other side of the truth is brought into prominence, that, at that day, we shall be surprised when we hear from His lips what we have really done. True Christian beneficence has consciously for its motive the pleasing of Christ; but still he who most earnestly strove, while here, to do all as unto Jesus, will be full of thankful wonder at the grace which accepts his poor service, and will learn, with fresh marvelling, how closely He associates Himself with His humblest servant. There is an element of mystery hidden from ourselves in all our deeds. Our love to Christ's followers never goes out so plainly to Him that, while here, we can venture to be sure that He takes it as done for Him. We cannot here follow the flight of the arrow, nor know what meaning He will attach to, or what large issues He will evolve from, our poor doings. So heaven will be full of blessed surprises, as we reap the fruit growing 'in power' of what we sowed 'in weakness,' and as doleful will be the astonishment which will seize those who see, for the first time, in the lurid light of that day, the true character of their lives, as one long neglect of plain duties, which was all a defrauding the Saviour of His due. Mere doing nothing is enough to condemn, and its victims will be shudderingly amazed at the fatal wound it has inflicted on them.

IV. The irrevocableness of the judgment. That is an awful contrast between the 'Come! ye blessed,' and 'Depart! ye cursed.' That is a more awful parallel between 'eternal punishment' and 'eternal life.' It is futile to attempt to alleviate the awfulness by emptying the word 'eternal' of reference to duration. It no doubt connotes quality, but its first meaning is ever-

during. There is nothing here to suggest that the one condition is more terminable than the other. Rather, the emphatic repetition of the word brings the unending continuance of each into prominence, as the point in which these two states, so wofully unlike, are the same. In whatever other passages the doctrine of universal restoration may seem to find a foothold, there is not an inch of standing-room for it here. Reverently accepting Christ's words as those of perfect and infallible love, the present writer feels so strongly the difficulty of bringing all the New Testament declarations on this dread question into a harmonious whole, that he abjures for himself dogmatic certainty, and dreads lest, in the eagerness of discussing the duration (which will never be beyond the reach of discussion), the solemn reality of the fact of future retribution should be dimmed, and men should argue about 'the terror of the Lord' till they cease to feel it.

THE DEFENCE OF UNCALCULATING LOVE

'Now when Jesus was in Bethany, in the house of Simon the leper, 7. There came unto him a woman having an alabaster box of very precious ointment, and poured it on His head, as He sat at meat. 8. But when His disciples saw it, they had indignation, saying, To what purpose is this waste? 9. For this ointment might have been sold for much, and given to the poor. 10. When Jesus understood it, He said unto them, Why trouble ye the woman? for she hath wrought a good work upon Me. 11. For ye have the poor always with you; but Me ye have not always. 12. For in that she hath poured this ointment on My body, she did it for My burial. 13. Verily I say unto you, Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this, that this woman hath done, be told for a memorial of her. 14. Then one of the twelve, called Judas Iscariot, went unto the chief priests, 15. And said unto them, What will ye give me, and I will deliver Him unto you? And they covenanted with him for thirty pieces of silver. 16. And from that time he sought opportunity to betray Him.'—MATT. xxvi. 6-16.

JOHN tells us that the 'woman' was Mary, and the objector Judas. Both the deed and the cavil are better understood by knowing whence they came. Lazarus was a guest, and as his sister saw him sitting there by

Jesus her heart overflowed, and she could not but catch up her most precious possession, and lavish it on His head and feet. Love's impulses appear absurd to selfishness. How could Judas understand Mary? Detracting comments find ready ears. One sneer will cool down to contempt and blame the feelings of a company. People are always eager to pick holes in conduct which they uneasily feel to be above their own reach. Poor Mary! she had but yielded to the uncalculating impulse of her great love, and she finds herself charged with imprudence, waste, and unfeeling neglect of the poor. No wonder that her gentle heart was 'troubled.' But Jesus threw the shield of His approval over her, and that was enough. Never mind how Judas and better men than he may find fault, if Jesus smiles acceptance.

His great words set forth, first, the vindication of the act, because of its motive. Anything done with no regard to any end but Himself is, in His eyes, 'good.' The perfection of conduct is that it shall all be referred to Jesus. That 'altar' sanctifies gift and giver. Conversely, whatever has no reference to Him lacks the highest beauty of goodness. A pebble in the bed of a sunlit stream has its veins of colour brought out; lift it out, and, as it dries, it dulls. So our deeds plunged into that great river are heightened in loveliness. Everything which has 'For Christ's sake' stamped on it is thereby hallowed. That is the unfailing recipe for making a life fair. Mary was thinking only of Jesus and of her love to Him, therefore what she did was sweet to Him. The greater part of a deed is its motive, and the perfect motive is love to Jesus.

But, further, Christ defends the side of Mary's deed which the critics fastened on. They posed as being

more practical and benevolent than she was. They were utilitarians, she was wasteful. Their objection sounds sensible, but it belongs to the low levels of life. One flash of lofty love would have killed it. Christ's reply to it draws a contrast between constant duties and special, transient moments. It is coloured, too, by His consciousness of His near end, and has an undertone of sadness in that 'Me ye have not always.' There are high tides of Christian emotion, when the question of what good this thing will do is submerged, and the only question is, 'What best thing shall I render to the Lord?' The critics were not more beneficent, but less inflamed with love to Jesus, and the leader of them only wished that the proceeds of the ointment had come into his hands, where some of it would have stuck. We hear the same sort of taunt to-day,—What is the sense of all this money being spent on missions and religious objects? How much more useful it would be if expended on better dwellings for the poor or hospitals or technical schools! But there is a place in Christ's treasury for useless deeds, if they are the pure expression of love to Him, and Mary's alabaster box, which did no good at all, lies beside the cups that held cold water which slaked some thirsty lips. Uncalculating impulse, which only knows that it would fain give all to the Lover of souls, is not merely excused, but praised, by Jesus. Lovers on earth do not concern themselves about the usefulness of their gifts, and the divine Lover rejoices over what cold-blooded spectators, who do not in the least understand the ways of loving hearts, find useless 'waste.' The world would put all the emotions of Christian hearts, and all the heroisms of Christian martyrs, and all the sacrifices of Christian workers, into the same class. Jesus accepts them all.

Again, He breathes a meaning into the gift beyond what the giver meant. Mary did not regard her anointing as preparatory to His burial, but He had His thoughts fixed on it, and He sought to prepare the disciples for the coming storm. How far away from the simple festivities in Simon's house were His thoughts! What a gulf between the other guests and Him! But Jesus always puts significance into the service which He accepts, and surprises the givers by the far-reaching issues of their gifts. We know not what He may make our poor deeds mean. Results are beyond our vision. Therefore let us make sure of what is within our horizon—namely, motives. If we do anything for His sake, He will take care of what it comes to. That is true even on earth, and still more true in heaven. 'Lord, when saw we Thee an hungred, and fed Thee?' What surprises will wait Christ's humble servants in heaven, when they see what was the true nature and the widespread consequences of their humble deeds! 'Thou sowest not that body that shall be, but bare grain, . . . but God giveth it a body as it hath pleased Him.'

Again, Mark gives an additional clause in Christ's words, which brings out the principle that the measure of acceptable service is ability. 'She hath done what she could' is an apology, or rather a vindication, for the shape of the gift. Mary was not practical, and could not 'serve' like Martha; she probably had no other precious thing that she could give, but she could love, and she could bestow her best on Jesus. But the saying implies a stringent demand, as well as a gracious defence. Nothing less than the full measure of ability is the measure of Christian obligation. Power to its last particle is duty. Jesus does not ask how much

His servants do or give, but He does ask that they should do and give all that they can. He wishes us to be ourselves in serving Him, and to shape our methods according to character and capabilities, but He also wishes us to give Him our whole selves. If anything is kept back, all that is given is marred.

Jesus' last word gives perpetuity to the service which He accepts. Mary is promised immortality for her deed, and the promise has been fulfilled, and here are we, all these centuries after, looking at her as she breaks the box and pours it on His head. Jesus is not unrighteous to forget any work of love done for Him. The fragrance of the ointment soon passed away, and the shreds of the broken cruse were swept into the dust-bin, with the other relics of the feast; but all the world knows of that act of all-surrendering love, and it smells sweet and blossoms for evermore.

THE NEW PASSOVER

'Now the first day of the feast of unleavened bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying unto Him, Where wilt Thou that we prepare for Thee to eat the passover? 18. And He said, Go into the city to such a man, and say unto him, The Master saith, My time is at hand; I will keep the passover at thy house with My disciples. 19. And the disciples did as Jesus had appointed them; and they made ready the passover. 20. Now when the even was come, He sat down with the twelve. 21. And as they did eat, He said, Verily I say unto you, That one of you shall betray Me. 22. And they were exceeding sorrowful, and began every one of them to say unto Him, Lord, is it I? 23. And He answered and said, He that dippeth his hand with Me in the dish, the same shall betray Me. 24. The Son of Man goeth as it is written of Him; but woe unto that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! it had been good for that man if he had not been born. 25. Then Judas, which betrayed Him, answered and said, Master, is it I? He said unto him, Thou hast said. 26. And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is My body. 27. And He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; 28. For this is My blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. 29. But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom. 30. And when they had sung an hymn, they went out into the Mount of Olives.'—MATT. xxvi. 17-30.

THE Tuesday of Passion Week was occupied by the wonderful discourses which have furnished so many

of our meditations. At its close Jesus sought retirement in Bethany, not only to soothe and prepare His spirit, but to 'hide Himself' from the Sanhedrin. There He spent the Wednesday. Who can imagine His thoughts? While He was calmly reposing in Mary's quiet home, the rulers determined on His arrest, but were at a loss how to effect it without a riot. Judas comes to them opportunely, and they leave it to him to give the signal. Possibly we may account for the peculiar secrecy observed as to the place for the last supper, by our Lord's knowledge that His steps were watched, and by His earnest wish to eat the Passover with the disciples before He suffered. The change between the courting of publicity and almost inviting of arrest at the beginning of the week, and the evident desire to postpone the crisis till the fitting moment which marks the close of it, is remarkable, and most naturally explained by the supposition that He wished the time of His death to be that very hour when, according to law, the paschal lamb was slain. On the Thursday, then, he sent Peter and John into the city to prepare the Passover; the others being in ignorance of the place till they were there, and Judas being thus prevented from carrying out his purpose till after the celebration.

The precautions taken to ensure this have left their mark on Matthew's narrative, in the peculiar designation of the host,—'Such a man!' It is a kind of echo of the mystery which he so well remembered as round the errand of the two. He does not seem to have heard of the token by which they knew the house, viz., the man with the pitcher whom they were to meet. But he does know that Peter and John got secret instructions, and that he and the others wondered

where they were to go. Had there been a previous arrangement with this unnamed 'such an one,' or were the token and the message alike instances of Christ's supernatural knowledge and authority? It is difficult to say. I incline to the former supposition, which would be in accordance with the distinct effort after secrecy which marks these days; but the narratives do not decide the question. At all events, the host was a disciple, as appears from the authoritative 'the Master saith'; and, whether he had known beforehand that 'this day' incarnate 'salvation would come to his house' or no, he eagerly accepts the peril and the honour. The message is royal in its tone. The Lord does not ask permission, but issues His commands. But He is a pauper King, not having where to lay His head, and needing another man's house in which to gather His own household together for the family feast of the Passover. What profound truths are wrapped up in that 'My time is come'! It speaks of the voluntariness of His surrender, the consciousness that His Cross was the centre point of His work, His superiority to all external influences as determining the hour of His death, and His submission to the supreme appointment of the Father. Obedience and freedom, choice and necessity, are wonderfully blended in it.

So, late on that Thursday evening, the little band left Bethany for the last time, in a fashion very unlike the joyous stir of the triumphal entry. As the evening is falling, they thread their way through the noisy streets, all astir with the festal crowds, and reach the upper room, Judas vainly watching for an opportunity to slip away on his black errand. The chamber, prepared by unknown hands, has vanished, and the hands are dust; but both are immortal. How many of the living

acts of His servants in like manner seem to perish, and the doers of them to be forgotten or unknown! But He knows the name of 'such an one,' and does not forget that he opened his door for Him to enter in and sup.

The fact that Jesus put aside the Passover and founded the Lord's Supper in its place, tells much both about *His* authority and *its* meaning. What must He have conceived of Himself, who bade Jew and Gentile turn away from that God-appointed festival, and think not of Moses, but of Him? What did He mean by setting the Lord's Supper in the place of the Passover, if He did not mean that He was the true Paschal Lamb, that His death was a true sacrifice, that in His sprinkled blood was safety, that His death inaugurated the better deliverance of the true Israel from a darker prison-house and a sorer bondage, that His followers were a family, and that 'the children's bread' was the sacrifice which He had made? There are many reasons for the doubling of the commemorative emblem, but this is obviously one of the chief—that, by the separation of the two in the rite, we are carried back to the separation in fact; that is to say, to the violent death of Christ. Not His flesh alone, in the sense of Incarnation, but His body broken and His blood shed, are what He wills should be for ever remembered. His own estimate of the centre point of His work is unmistakably pronounced in His institution of this rite.

But we may consider the force of each emblem separately. In many important points they mean the same things, but they have each their own significance as well. Matthew's condensed version of the words of institution omits all reference to the breaking of the body and to the memorial character of the observance, but both are implied. He emphasises the reception,

the participation, and the significance of the bread. As to the latter, 'This is My body' is to be understood in the same way as 'the field is the world,' and many other sayings. To speak in the language of grammarians, the copula is that of symbolic relationship, not that of existence; or, to speak in the language of the street, 'is' here means, as it often does, 'represents.' How could it mean anything else, when Christ sat there in His body, and His blood was in His veins? What, then, is the teaching of this symbol? It is not merely that He in His humanity is the bread of life, but that He in His death is the nourishment of our true life. In that great discourse in John's Gospel, which embodies in words the lessons which the Lord's Supper teaches by symbols, He advances from the general statement, 'I am the Bread of Life,' to the yet more mysterious and profound teaching that His flesh, which at some then future point He will 'give for the life of the world,' is the bread; thus distinctly foreshadowing His death, and asserting that by that death we live, and by partaking of it are nourished. The participation in the benefits of Christ's death, which is symbolised by 'Take, eat,' is effected by living faith. We feed on Christ when our minds are occupied with His truth, and our hearts nourished by His love, when it is the 'meat' of our wills to do His will, and when our whole inward man fastens on Him as its true object, and draws from Him its best being. But the act of reception teaches the great lesson that Christ must be in us, if He is to do us any good. He is not 'for us' in any real sense, unless He be 'in us.' The word rendered in John's Gospel 'eateth' is that used for the ruminating of cattle, and wonderfully indicates the calm, continual, patient meditation by which alone we can

receive Christ into our hearts, and nourish our lives on Him. Bread eaten is assimilated to the body, but this bread eaten assimilates the eater to itself, and he who feeds on Christ becomes Christ-like, as the silk-worm takes the hue of the leaves on which it browses. Bread eaten to-day will not nourish us to-morrow, neither will past experiences of Christ's sweetness sustain the soul. He must be 'our daily bread' if we are not to pine with hunger.

The wine carries its own special teaching, which clearly appears in Matthew's version of the words of institution. It is 'My blood,' and by its being presented in a form separate from the bread which is His body suggests a violent death. It is 'covenant blood,' the seal of that 'better covenant' than the old, which God makes now with all mankind, wherein are given renewed hearts which carry the divine law within themselves; the reciprocal and mutually blessed possession of God by men and of men by God, the universally diffused knowledge of God, which is more than head knowledge, being the consciousness of possessing Him; and, finally, the oblivion of all sins. These promises are fulfilled, and the covenant made sure, by the shed blood of Christ. So, finally, it is 'shed for many, for the remission of sins.' The end of Christ's death is pardon, which can only be extended on the ground of His death. We are told that Christ did not teach the doctrine of atonement. Did He establish the Lord's Supper? If He did (and nobody denies that), what did He mean by it, if He did not mean the setting forth by symbol of the very same truth which, stated in words, is the doctrine of His atoning death? This rite does not, indeed, explain the *rationale* of the doctrine; but it is a piece of unmeaning mummery, unless it preaches

plainly the fact that Christ's death is the ground of our forgiveness.

Bread is the 'staff of life,' but blood is the life. So 'this cup' teaches that 'the life' of Jesus Christ must pass into His people's veins, and that the secret of the Christian life is 'I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me.' Wine is joy, and the Christian life is not only to be a feeding of the soul on Christ as its nourishment, but a glad partaking, as at a feast, of His life and therein of His joy. Gladness of heart is a Christian duty, 'the joy of the Lord is your strength' and should be *our* joy; and though here we eat with loins girt, and go out, some of us to deny, some of us to flee, all of us to toil and suffer, yet we may have His joy fulfilled in ourselves, even whilst we sorrow.

The Lord's Supper is predominantly a memorial, but it is also a prophecy, and is marked as such by the mysterious last words of Jesus, about drinking the new wine in the Father's kingdom. They point the thoughts of the saddened eleven, on whom the dark shadow of parting lay heavily, to an eternal reunion, in a land where 'all things are become new,' and where the festal cup shall be filled with a draught that has power to gladden and to inspire beyond any experience here. The joys of heaven will be so far analogous to the Christian joys of earth that the same name may be applied to both; but they will be so unlike that the old name will need a new meaning, and communion with Christ at His table in His kingdom, and our exuberance of joy in the full drinking in of His immortal life, will transcend the selectest hours of communion here. Compared with that fulness of joy they will be 'as water unto wine,'—the new wine of the kingdom.

‘IS IT I?’

‘And they were exceeding sorrowful, and began every one of them to say unto Him, Lord, is it I? 25. Then Judas, which betrayed Him, answered and said, Master, is it I? He said unto him, Thou hast said.’—MATT. xxvi. 22, 25.

‘He then lying on Jesus’ breast saith unto Him, Lord, who is it?’—JOHN xiii. 25.

THE genius of many great painters has portrayed the Lord’s Supper, but the reality of it was very different from their imaginings. We have to picture to ourselves some low table, probably a mere tray spread upon the ground, round which our Lord and the twelve reclined, in such a fashion as that the head of each guest came against the bosom of him that reclined above him; the place of honour being at the Lord’s left hand, or higher up the table than Himself, and the second place being at His right, or below Himself.

So there would be no eager gesticulations of disciples starting to their feet when our Lord uttered the sad announcement, ‘One of you shall betray Me!’ but only horror-struck amazement settled down upon the group. These verses, which we have put together, show us three stages in the conversation which followed the sad announcement. The three evangelists give us two of these; John alone omits these two, and only gives us the third.

First, we have their question, born of a glimpse into the possibilities of evil in their hearts, ‘Lord, is it I?’

The form of that question in the original suggests that they expected a negative answer, and might be reproduced in English: ‘Surely it is not I?’ None of them could think that he was the traitor, yet none of

them could be sure that he was not. Their Master knew better than they did; and so, from a humble knowledge of what lay in them, coiled and slumbering, *but there*, they would not meet His words with a contradiction, but with a question. His answer spares the betrayer, and lets the dread work in their consciences for a little longer, for their good. For many hands dipped in the dish together, to moisten their morsels; and to say, 'He that dippeth with Me in the dish, the same shall betray Me,' was to say nothing more than 'One of you at the table.'

Then comes the second stage. Judas, reassured that he has escaped detection for the moment, and perhaps doubting whether the Master had anything more than a vague suspicion of treachery, or knew who was the traitor, shapes his lying lips with loathsome audacity into the same question, but yet not quite the same. The others had said, 'Is it I, Lord?' he falters when he comes to that name, and dare not say 'Lord!' That sticks in his throat. 'Rabbi!' is as far as he can get. 'Is it I, Rabbi?' Christ's answer to him, 'Thou hast said,' is another instance of patient longsuffering. It was evidently a whisper that did not reach the ears of any of the others, for he leaves the room without suspicion. Our Lord still tries to save him from himself by showing Judas that his purpose is known, and by still concealing his name.

Then comes the third stage, which we owe to John's Gospel. Here again he is true to his task of supplementing the narrative of the three synoptic Gospels. Remembering what I have said about the attitude of the disciples at the table, we can understand that Peter, if he occupied the principal place at the Lord's left, was less favourably situated for speaking to Christ than

John, who reclined in the second seat at His right, and so he beckoned over the Master's head to John. The Revised Version gives the force of the original more vividly than the Authorised does: 'He, leaning back, as he was, on Jesus' breast, saith unto Him, Lord! who is it?' John, with a natural movement, bends back his head on his Master's breast, so as to ask and be answered, in a whisper. His question is *not*, 'Is it I?' He that leaned on Christ's bosom, and was compassed about by Christ's love, did not need to ask that. The question now is, 'Who is it?' Not a question of presumption, nor of curiosity, but of affection; and therefore answered: 'He it is to whom I shall give the sop, when I have dipped it.'

The morsel dipped in the dish and passed by the host's hand to a guest, was a token of favour, of unity and confidence. It was one more attempt to save Judas, one more token of all-forgiving patience. No wonder that that last sign of friendship embittered his hatred and sharpened his purpose to an unalterable decision, or, as John says: 'After the sop, Satan entered into him.' For then, as ever, the heart which is not melted by Christ's offered love is hardened by it.

Now, if we take these three stages of this conversation we may learn some valuable lessons from them. I take the first form of the question as an example of that wholesome self-distrust which a glimpse into the slumbering possibilities of evil in our hearts ought to give us all. I take the second on the lips of Judas, as an example of the very opposite of that self-distrust, the fixed determination to do a wrong thing, however clearly we know it to be wrong. And I take the last form of the question, as asked by John, as an illustration of the peaceful confidence which comes from the

consciousness of Christ's love, and of communion with Him. Now a word or two about each of these.

I. First, we have an example of that wholesome self-distrust, which a glimpse into the possibilities of evil that lie slumbering in all our hearts ought to teach every one of us.

Every man is a mystery to himself. In every soul there lie, coiled and dormant, like hibernating snakes, evils that a very slight rise in the temperature will wake up into poisonous activity. And let no man say, in foolish self-confidence, that any form of sin which his brother has ever committed is impossible for him. Temperament shields us from much, no doubt. There are sins that 'we are inclined to,' and there are sins that 'we have no mind to.' But the identity of human nature is deeper than the diversity of temperament, and there are two or three considerations that should abate a man's confidence that *anything* which one man has done it is impossible that he should do. Let me enumerate them very briefly. Remember, to begin with, that all sins are at bottom but varying forms of one root. The essence of every evil is selfishness, and when you have that, it is exactly as with cooks who have the 'stock' by the fireside. They can make any kind of soup out of it, with the right flavouring. We have got the mother tincture of all wickedness in each of our hearts; and therefore do not let us be so sure that it cannot be manipulated and flavoured into any form of sin. All sin is one at bottom, and this is the definition of it—living to myself instead of living to God. So it may easily pass from one form of evil into another, just as light and heat, motion and electricity, are all—they tell us—various forms and phases of one force. Just as doctors will

tell you that there are types of disease which slip from one form of sickness into another, so if we have got the infection about us it is a matter very much of accidental circumstances what shape it takes. And no man with a human heart is safe in pointing to any sin, and saying, '*That* form of transgression I reckon alien to myself.'

And then let me remind you, too, that the same consideration is reinforced by this other fact, that all sin is, if I may so say, gregarious; is apt not only to slip from one form into another, but that any evil is apt to draw another after it. The tangled mass of sin is like one of those great fields of seaweed that you sometimes come across upon the ocean, all hanging together by a thousand slimy growths; which, if lifted from the wave at any point, drags up yards of it inextricably grown together. No man commits only one kind of transgression. All sins hunt in couples. According to the grim picture of the Old Testament, about another matter, 'None of them shall want his mate. The wild beasts of the desert shall meet with the wild beasts of the islands.' One sin opens the door for another, 'and seven other spirits worse than himself' come and make holiday in the man's heart.

Again, any evil is possible to us, seeing that all sin is but yielding to tendencies common to us all. The greatest transgressions have resulted from yielding to such tendencies. Cain killed his brother from jealousy; David besmirched his name and his reign by animal passion; Judas betrayed Christ because he was fond of money. Many a man has murdered another one simply because he had a hot temper. And you have got a temper, and you have got the love of money, and you have got animal passions, and you have got

that which may stir you up into jealousy. Your neighbour's house has caught fire and been blown up. Your house, too, is built of wood, and thatched with straw, and you have as much dynamite in your cellars as he had in his. Do not be too sure that you are safe from the danger of explosion.

And, again, remember that this same wholesome self-distrust is needful for us all, because all transgression is yielding to temptations that assail all men. Here are one hundred men in a plague-stricken city; they have all got to draw their water from the same well. If five or six of them died of cholera it would be very foolish of the other ninety-five to say, 'There is no chance of our being touched.' We all live in the same atmosphere; and the temptations that have overcome the men that have headed the count of crimes appeal to you. So the lesson is, 'Be not high-minded, but fear.'

And remember, still further, that the same solemn consideration is enforced upon us by the thought that men will gradually drop down to the level which, before they began the descent, seemed to be impossible to them. 'Is thy servant a dog that he should do this thing?' said Hazael when the crime of murdering his master first floated before him. Yes, but he did it. By degrees he came down to the level to which he thought that he would never sink. First the imagination is inflamed, then the wish begins to draw the soul to the sin, then conscience pulls it back, then the fatal decision is made, and the deed is done. Sometimes all the stages are hurried quickly through, and a man spins downhill as cheerily and fast as a diligence down the Alps. Sometimes, as the coast of a country may sink an inch in a century until long miles of the

flat seabeach are under water, and towers and cities are buried beneath the barren waves, so our lives may be gradually lowered, with a motion imperceptible but most real, bringing us down within high-water mark, and at last the tide may wash over what was solid land.

So, dear friends, there is nothing more foolish than for any man to stand, self-confident that any form of evil that has conquered his brother has no temptation for him. It may not have for you, under present circumstances; it may not have for you to-day; but, oh! we have all of us one human heart, and 'he that trusteth in his own heart is a fool.' 'Blessed is the man that feareth always.' Humble self-distrust, consciousness of sleeping sin in my heart that may very quickly be stirred into stinging and striking; rigid self-control over all these possibilities of evil, are duties dictated by the plainest common-sense.

Do not say, 'I know when to stop.' Do not say, 'I can go so far; it will not do me any harm.' Many a man has said that, and many a man has been ruined by it. Do not say, 'It is natural to me to have these inclinations and tastes, and there can be no harm in yielding to them.' It is perfectly natural for a man to stoop down over the edge of a precipice to gather the flowers that are growing in some cranny in the cliff; and it is as natural for him to topple over, and be smashed to a mummy at the bottom. God gave you your dispositions and your whole nature 'under lock and key,'—keep them so. And when you hear of, or see, great criminals and great crimes, say to yourself, as the good old Puritan divine said, looking at a man going to the scaffold, 'But for the grace of God there

go I!' And in the contemplation of sins and apostasies, let us each look humbly at our own weakness, and pray Him to keep us from our brother's evils which may easily become ours.

II. Secondly, we have here an example of precisely the opposite sort, namely, of that fixed determination to do evil which is unshaken by the clearest knowledge that it is evil.

Judas heard his crime described in its own ugly reality. He heard his fate proclaimed by lips of absolute love and truth; and notwithstanding both, he comes unmoved and unshaken with his question. The dogged determination in his heart, that dares to see his evil stripped naked and is 'not ashamed,' is even more dreadful than the hypocrisy and sleek simulation of friendship in his face.

Now most men turn away with horror from even the sins that they are willing to do, when they are put plainly and bluntly before them. As an old mediæval preacher once said, 'There is nothing that is weaker than the devil stripped naked.' By which he meant exactly this—that we have to dress wrong in some fantastic costume or other, so as to hide its native ugliness, in order to tempt men to do it. So we have two sets of names for wrong things, one of which we apply to our brethren's sins, and the other to the same sins in ourselves. What I do is 'prudence,' what you do of the same sort is 'covetousness'; what I do is 'sowing my wild oats,' what you do is 'immorality' and 'dissipation'; what I do is 'generous living,' what you do is 'drunkenness' and 'gluttony'; what I do is 'righteous indignation,' what you do is 'passionate anger.' And so you may go the whole round of evil. Very bad are the men who

can look at their deed, described in its own inherent deformity, and yet say, 'Yes; that *is* it, and I am going to do it.' 'One of you shall betray Me.' 'Yes; I will betray you!' It must have taken something to look into the Master's face, and keep the fixed purpose steady.

Now I ask you to think, dear friends, of this, that that obstinate condition of dogged determination to do a wrong thing, knowing it to be a wrong thing, is a condition to which all evil steadily tends. We may not come to it in this world—I do not know that men ever do so wholly; but we are all getting towards it in regard to the special wrong deeds and desires which we cherish and commit. And when a man has once reached the point of saying to evil, 'Be thou my good,' then he is a 'devil' in the true meaning of the word; and wherever he is, he is in hell! And the one unpardonable sin is the sin of clear recognition that a given thing is contrary to God's will, and unfaltering determination, notwithstanding, to do it. That is the only sin that cannot be pardoned, 'either in this world or in the world to come.'

And so, my brother, seeing that such a condition is possible, and that all the paths of evil, however tentative and timorous they may be at first, and however much the sin may be wrapped up with excuses and forms and masks, tend to that condition, let us take that old prayer upon our lips, which befits both those who distrust themselves because of slumbering sins, and those who dread being conquered by manifest iniquity:—'Who can understand his errors? Cleanse Thou me from secret faults. Keep back Thy servant also from presumptuous sins. Let them not have dominion over me.'

III. Now, lastly, we have in the last question an example of the peaceful confidence that comes from communion with Jesus Christ.

John leaned on the Master's bosom. 'He was the disciple whom Jesus loved.' And so compassed with that great love, and feeling absolute security within the enclosure of that strong hand, his question is not, 'Is it I?' but 'Who is it?' From which I think we may fairly draw the conclusion that to feel that Christ loves me, and that I am compassed about by Him, is the true security against my falling into any sin.

It was not John's love to Christ, but Christ's to John that made his safety. He did not say: 'I love Thee so much that I cannot betray Thee.' For all our feelings and emotions are but variable, and to build confidence upon them is to build a heavy building upon quicksand; the very weight of it drives out the foundations. But he thought to himself—or he felt rather than he thought—that all about him lay the sweet, warm, rich atmosphere of his Master's love; and to a man who was encompassed by that, treachery was impossible.

Sin has no temptation so long as we actually enjoy the greater sweetness of Christ's felt love. Would thirty pieces of silver have been a bribe to John? Would anything that could have terrified others have frightened him from his Master's side whilst he felt His love? Will a handful of imitation jewellery, made out of coloured glass and paste, be any temptation to a man who bears a rich diamond on his finger? And will any of earth's sweetness be a temptation to a man who lives in the continual consciousness of the great rich love of Christ wrapping him round about? Brethren, not ourselves, not our faith, not our emotion, not our religious experience; nothing that

is in us, is any security that we may not be tempted, and yield to the temptation, and deny or betray our Lord. There is only one thing that is a security, and that is that we be folded to the heart, and held by the hand, of that loving Lord. Then—then we may be confident that we shall not fall; for ‘the Lord is able to make us stand.’

Such confidence is but the other side of our self-distrust; is the constant accompaniment of it, must have that self-distrust for its condition and prerequisite, and leads to a yet deeper and more blessed form of that self-distrust. Faith in Him and ‘no confidence in the flesh’ are but the two sides of the same coin, the obverse and the reverse. The seed, planted in the ground, sends a little rootlet down, and a little spikelet up, by the same vital act. And so in our hearts, as it were, the downward rootlet is self-despair, and the upward shoot is faith in Christ. The two emotions go together—the more we distrust ourselves the more we shall rest upon Him, and the more we rest upon Him, and feel that all our strength comes, not from our foot, but from the Rock on which it stands, the more we shall distrust our own ability and our own faithfulness.

Therefore, dear brethren, looking upon all the evil that is around us, and conscious in some measure of the weakness of our own hearts, let us do as a man would do who stands upon the narrow ledge of a cliff, and look sheer down into the depth below, and feels his head begin to reel and turn giddy; let us lay hold of the Guide’s hand, and if we cleave by Him, He will hold up our goings that our footsteps slip not. Nothing else will. No length of obedient service is any guarantee against treachery and rebellion. As John Bunyan saw,

there was a backdoor to hell from the gate of the Celestial City. Men have lived for years consistent professing Christians, and have fallen at last. Many a ship has come across half the world, and gone to pieces on the harbour bar. Many an army, victorious in a hundred fights, has been annihilated at last. No depths of religious experience, no heights of religious blessedness, no attainments of past virtue and self-sacrifice, are any guarantees for to-morrow. Trust in nothing and in nobody, least of all in yourselves and your own past. Trust only in Jesus Christ.

'Now unto Him that is able to keep us from falling, and to present us faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy; to the only wise God our Saviour be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and for ever.' Amen.

'THIS CUP'

'And Jesus took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; 28. For this is My blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.'—MATT. xxvi. 27, 28.

THE comparative silence of our Lord as to the sacrificial character of His death has very often been urged as a reason for doubting that doctrine, and for regarding it as no part of the original Christian teaching. That silence may be accounted for by sufficient reasons. It has been very much exaggerated, and those who argue from it against the doctrine of the Atonement have forgotten that Jesus Christ founded the Lord's Supper.

That rite shows us what He thought, and what He would have us think, of His death; and in the presence of its testimony it seems to me impossible to deny that

His conception of it was distinctly sacrificial. By it He points out the moment of His whole career which He desires that men should remember. Not His words of tenderness and wisdom; not His miracles, amazing and gracious as these were; not the flawless beauty of His character, though it touches all hearts and wins the most rugged to love, and the most degraded to hope; but the moment in which He gave His life is what He would imprint for ever on the memory of the world.

And not only so, but in the rite he distinctly tells us in what aspect He would have that death remembered. Not as the tragic end of a noble career which might be hallowed by tears such as are shed over a martyr's ashes; not as the crowning proof of love; not as the supreme act of patient forgiveness; but as a death for us, in which, as by the blood of the sacrifice, is secured the remission of sins.

And not only so, but the double symbol in the Lord's Supper—whilst in some respects the bread and wine speak the same truths, and certainly point to the same Cross—has in each of its parts special lessons intrusted to it, and special truths to proclaim. The bread and the wine both say:—'Remember Me and My death.' Taken in conjunction they point to that death as violent; taken separately they each suggest various aspects of it, and of the blessings that will flow to us therefrom. And it is my present purpose to bring out, as briefly and as clearly as I can, the special lessons which our Lord would have us draw from that cup which is the emblem of His shed blood.

I. First, then, observe that it speaks to us of a divine treaty or covenant.

Ancient Israel had lived for nearly 2000 years under

the charter of their national existence which, as we read in the Old Testament, was given on Sinai amidst thunderings and lightnings—‘Now, therefore, if ye will obey My voice indeed, and keep My covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine, and ye shall be unto Me a kingdom of priests and an holy nation.’

And that covenant, or agreement, or treaty, on the part of God, was ratified by a solemn act, in which the blood of the sacrifice, divided into two portions, was sprinkled, one half upon the altar, and the other half, after their acceptance of the conditions and obligations of the covenant, on the people, who had pledged themselves to obedience.

And now, here is a Galilean peasant, in a borrowed upper room, within four-and-twenty hours of His ignominious death which might seem to blast all His work, who steps forward and says, ‘I put away that ancient covenant which knits this nation to God. It is antiquated. I am the true offering and sacrifice, by the blood of which, sprinkled on altar and on people, a new covenant, built upon better promises, shall henceforth be.’

What a tremendous piece of audacity, except on the one hypothesis that He that spake was indeed the Word of God; and that He was making that which Himself had established of old, to give way to that which He establishes now! The new covenant which Christ seals in His blood, is the charter, the better charter, under the conditions of which, not a nation but the world may find an external salvation which dwarfs all the deliverances of the past. That idea of a covenant confirmed by Christ’s blood may sound to many hearers dry and hard. But if you will

try to think what great truths are wrapped up in the theological phraseology, you will find them very real and very strong. Is it not a grand thought that between us and the infinite divine Nature there is established a firm and unmovable agreement? Then He has revealed His purposes; we are not left to grope in darkness, at the mercy of 'peradventures' and 'probables'; nor reduced to consult the ambiguous oracles of nature or of Providence, or the varying voices of our own hearts, or painfully and dubiously to construct more or less strong bases for confidence in a loving God out of such hints and fragments of revelation as these supply. He has come out of His darkness, and spoken articulate words, plain words, faithful words, which bind Him to a distinctly defined course of action. Across the great ocean of possible modes of action for a divine nature He has, if I may so say, buoyed out for Himself a channel, so as that we know His path, which is in the deep waters. He has limited Himself by the utterance of a faithful word, and we can now come to Him with His own promise, and cast it down before Him, and say: 'Thou hast spoken, and Thou art bound to fulfil it.' We have a covenant wherein God has shown us His hand, has told us what He is going to do and has thereby pledged Himself to its performance.

And, still further, in order to get the full sweetness of this thought, to break the husk and reach to the kernel, you must remember what, according to the New Testament, are the conditions of this covenant. The old agreement was, 'If ye will obey My voice and do My commandments, then,'—so and so will happen. The old condition was, 'Do and live; be righteous and blessed!' The new condition is: 'Take and have;

believe and live!' The one was law, the other is gift; the one was retribution, the other is forgiveness. One was outward, hard, rigid law, fitly 'graven with a pen of iron on the rocks for ever'; the other is impulse, love, a power bestowed that will make us obedient; and the sole condition that we have to render is the condition of humble and believing acceptance of the divine gift. The new covenant, in the exuberant fulness of its mercy, and in the tenderness of its gracious purposes, is at once the completion and the antithesis of the ancient covenant with its precepts and its retribution.

And, still further, this 'new covenant,' of which the essence is God's bestowment of Himself on every heart that wills to possess Him; this new covenant, according to the teaching of these words of my text and of the symbol to which they refer, is ratified and sealed by that great sacrifice. The blood was sprinkled on the altar; the blood was sprinkled on the people, which being translated into plain, unmetaphorical language is simply this, that Christ's death remains for ever present to the divine mind as the great reason and motive which modifies His government, and which ensures that His love shall ever find its way to every seeking soul. His death is the token; His death is the reason; His death is the pledge of the unending and the inexhaustible mercy of God bestowed upon each of us. 'He that spared not His own Son, shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?' The outward rite with its symbol is the exhibition in visible form of that truth, that the blood of Jesus Christ seals to the world the infinite mercy of God.

And, on the other hand, that same blood of the covenant, sprinkled upon the other parties to the treaty, even our poor sinful hearts, binds them to the

fulfilment of the condition which belongs to them. That is to say, by the power of that sacrifice there are evoked in our poor souls, faith, love, surrender. It, and it alone, knits us to God; it, and it alone, binds us to the fulfilment of the covenant. My brother, have you entered into that sweet, solemn, sacred alliance and union with God? Have you accepted and fulfilled the conditions? Is your heart 'sprinkled with the blood so freely shed for you'; and have you thereby been brought into living alliance with the God who has pledged His being and His name to be the all-sufficient God to you?

II. Still further, this cup speaks to us of the forgiveness of sins.

One theory, and one theory only, as it seems to me, of the meaning of Christ's death, is possible if these words of my text ever dropped from Christ's lips, or if He ever instituted the rite to which they refer; He must have believed that His death was a sacrifice, without which the sins of the world were not forgiven; and by which forgiveness came to us all.

And I do not think that we rightly conceive the relation between the sacrifices of barbarous heathen tribes, or the sacrifices appointed in Israel, and the great sacrifice on the Cross, if we say that our Lord's death is only figuratively accommodated to these in order to meet lower or grosser conceptions, but rather, I take it, that the accommodation is the other way. In all nations beyond the limits of Israel the sacrifices of living victims spoke not only of surrender and dependence, but likewise of the consciousness of demerit and evil on the part of the offerers, and were at once a confession of sin, a prayer for pardon, and a propitiation of an offended God. And I believe that the sacrifices

in Israel were intended and adapted not only to meet the deep-felt want of human nature, common to them as to ~~all~~ other tribes, but also were intended and adapted to point onwards to Him in whose death a real want of mankind was met, in whose death a real sacrifice was offered, in whose death an angry God was not indeed propitiated, but in whose death the loving Father of our souls Himself provided the Lamb for the offering, without which, for reasons deeper than we can wholly fathom, it was impossible that sin should be remitted.

I insist upon no theory of an Atonement. I believe there is no Gospel, worth calling so, worth the preaching, worth your believing, or that will ever move the world or purify society, except the Gospel which begins with the fact of an Atonement, and points to the Cross as the altar on which the Sacrifice for the sins of the world, without whose death pardon is impossible, has died for us all.

Oh! dear friends, do not let yourselves be confused by the difficulties that beset all human and incomplete statements of the philosophy of the death of Christ; but getting away from these, cleave you to the fact that your sins were laid upon Christ, and that He has died for us all; that His death is a sacrifice; His body broken for us; and for the remission of our sins, His blood freely shed. Thus, and only thus, will you come to the understanding either of the sweetness of His love or of the power of His example; then, and only then, shall we know why it was that He elected to be remembered, out of all the moments of His life, by that one when He hung in weakness upon the Cross, and out of the darkness came the cry, ‘ My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?’

III. And now, again, let me remind you that this cup speaks likewise of a life infused.

'The blood is the life,' says the physiology of the Hebrews. The blood is the life, and when men drink of that cup they symbolise the fact that Christ's own life and spirit are imparted to them that love Him. 'Except ye eat the flesh, and drink the blood of the Son of Man, ye have no life in you.' The very heart of Christ's gift to us is the gift of His own very life to be the life of our lives. In deep, mystical reality He Himself passes into our being, and the 'law of the spirit of life makes us free from the law of sin and death,' so that we may say: 'He that is joined to the Lord is one spirit,' and the humble believing soul may rejoice in this: 'I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in Me.' This is, in one aspect, the very deepest meaning of this Communion rite. As physicians sometimes tried to restore life to an almost dead man by the transfusion into his shrunken veins of the fresh warm blood from a young and healthy subject, so into our fevered life, into our corrupted blood, there is poured the full tide of the pure and perfect life of Jesus Christ Himself, and we live, not by our own power, nor for our own will, nor in obedience to our own caprices, but by Him and in Him, and with Him and for Him. This is the heart of Christianity, the possession within us of the life, the immortal life of Him that died for us.

My brother! have you that great gift in your heart? Be sure of this, that unless the life of Christ is in you by faith, ye are dead, 'dead in trespasses and in sins'; dead, and sure to rot away and disintegrate into corruption. The cup of blessing which we drink speaks to us of the transfusion into our spirits of the Spirit of Jesus Christ.

IV. And lastly, it speaks of a festal gladness.

The bread says nothing to us of the remission of sins. The broken bread proclaims, indeed, our nourishment from Jesus, but falls short of the deep and solemn truth that it is the very life-blood of Christ Himself which nourishes us and vitalises us. And the bread, in like manner, proclaims indeed the fact that we are fed on Him, but says nothing of the joy of that feeding. The wine is the symbol of that, and it proclaims to us that the Christian life here on earth, just because it is the feeding on and the drinking in of Jesus Christ, ought ever to be a life of blessedness, of abounding joy, by whatsoever darkness, burdens, cares, toils, sorrows, and solitude it may be shaded and saddened. They who live on Christ, they who drink in of His spirit, they should be glad in all circumstances, they, and they alone. We sit at a table, though it be in the wilderness, though it be in the presence of our enemies, where there ought to be joy and the voice of rejoicing.

But beyond that, as our Master Himself taught these apostles in that upper room, this cup points onwards to a future feast. At that solemn hour Jesus stayed His own heart with the vision of the perfected kingdom and the glad festival then. So this Communion has a prophetic element in it, and links on with predictions and parables which speak of the 'marriage supper' of the great King, and of the time when we shall sit at His table in His kingdom.

For the past the Lord's Supper speaks of the one sufficient oblation and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world. For the present it speaks of life produced and sustained by communion with Jesus Christ. And for the future it speaks of the unending, joyful satisfaction of all desires in the 'upper room' of the heavens.

How unlike, and yet how like to that scene in the upper room at Jerusalem! From it the sad disciples went out, some of them to deny their Master; all of them to struggle, to sin, to lose Him from their sight, to toil, to sorrow, and at last to die. From that other table we shall go no more out, but sit there with Him in full fruition of unfailing blessedness and participation of His immortal life for evermore.

Dear brethren, these are the lessons, these the hopes, which this 'blood of the new covenant' teaches and inspires. Have you entered into that covenant with God? Have you made sure work of the forgiveness of your sins through His blood? Have you received into your spirits His immortal life? Then you may humbly be confident that, after life's weariness and lonesomeness are past, you will be welcomed to the banqueting hall by the Lord of the feast, and sit with Him and His servants who loved Him at that table and be glad.

'UNTIL THAT DAY'

'I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom.'—MATT. XXVI. 29.

THIS remarkable saying of our Lord's is recorded in all of the accounts of the institution of the Lord's Supper. The thought embodied in it ought to be present in the minds of all who partake of that rite. It converts what is primarily a memorial into a prophecy. It bids us hope as well as, and because we, remember. The light behind us is cast forward on to the dimness before. So the Apostle Paul, in his solitary reference to the Communion—which, indeed, is an entirely incidental one, and evoked simply by the corruptions in the Corinthian

Church, emphasises this prophetic and onward-looking aspect of the backward-looking rite when he says, 'Ye do show the Lord's death *till He come.*'

Now, it seems to me that those of us who so strongly hold that the Communion is primarily a simple memorial service, with no mysterious or magical efficacy of any sort about it, do rather ignore in our ordinary thoughts the other aspect which is brought out in my text; and that comparative ignoring seems to me to be but a part of a very lamentable and general tendency of this day, whereby the prospect of a future life has become somewhat dimmed and does not fill the place either in ordinary Christian thinking, or as a motive for Christian service which the proportion of faith, and the relative importance of the present and the future suggest that it ought to fill. The Christianity of this day has so much to do with the present life, and the thought of the Gospel as a power in the present has been so emphasised, in legitimate reaction from the opposite exaggeration, that there is great need, as I believe, to preach to Christian people the wisdom of making more prominent in their faith their immortal hope. I wish, then, to turn now to this aspect of the rite which we regard as a memorial, and try to emphasise its forward-looking attitude, and the large blessed truths that emerge if we consider that.

I. First, let me say just a word about the twin aspect of the Communion as a memorial prophecy, or prophetic remembrance.

Now, I need not remind you, I suppose, that according to the view which, as I believe, the New Testament takes, and which certainly we Nonconformists take, of all the rites of external worship, every one of them is a prophecy, because every act in which our sense

is brought in to reinforce the spirit—and by outward forms, be they vocal, or be they manual, or be they of any other sort, we try to express and to quicken spiritualemotions and intellectual convictions—declares its own imperfection, digs its own grave, and prophecies its own resurrection in a nobler and better fashion. Just because these outward symbols of bread and wine do, through the senses, quicken the faith and the love of the spirit, they declare themselves to be transitory, and they point onwards to the time when that which is perfect shall absorb, and so destroy, that which is in part, and when sense shall be no longer necessary as the ally and humble servant of spirit. ‘I saw no temple therein.’ Temples, and rites, and services, and holy days, and all the external apparatus of worship, are but scaffolding, and just as the scaffolding round a building is a prophecy of its own being pulled down when the building is reared and completed, so we cannot partake of these external symbols rightly, unless we recognise their transiency, and feel that they say to us, ‘A mightier than I cometh after me, the latchet of whose shoe I am not worthy to unloose.’ The light that shines in the dark heralds the day and its own extinction.

So, looking back we must look forward, and partaking of the symbol, we must reach out to the time when the symbol shall be antiquated, the reality having come. The Passover of Israel did not more truly point onwards to the true Lamb of Sacrifice, and to the true Passover that was slain for us, and to its own elevation into the Lord’s Supper of the Christian Church, than the Lord’s Supper of the Christian Church points onwards to the ‘marriage supper of the Lamb,’ and its own cessation.

But then, again, let me remind you that this pro-

phetic aspect is inherent in the memorial aspect of the Communion, because what we remember necessarily demands the coming of what we hope. That is to say, if Jesus Christ be what the Lord's Supper says that He is, and if He has done what that broken bread and poured out wine proclaim, according to His own utterance, that He has done, then clearly that death which was for the life of the world, that death which was the seal of a covenant, that body broken for the remission of sins, that wine partaken of as a reception into ourselves of the very life-blood of Jesus Christ, do all demand something far nobler and more perfect than the broken, incomplete obedience and loyalties and communions which Christian men here exercise and possess.

If He died, as the rite says that He did, and if dying He left such a commentary upon His act as that ordinance affords, then He cannot have done with the world; then the powers that were set in motion by His death cannot pause nor cease their action until they have reached their appropriate culmination in effecting all that it was in them to effect. If, leaving His people, He said to them, 'Never forget My death for you, My broken body, and My shed blood,' He therein said that the time will come, must come, when all the powers of the Cross shall be incorporated in humanity, and when the parted shall be reunited. The Communion would stand as the expression of Christ's mistaken estimate of His own importance, if there were not beyond the grave the perfecting of it, and the full appropriation and joyful possession of all which the death that it signifies brought to mankind.

Therefore, dear brethren, it seems to me that the best way by which Christians can deepen their con-

fidence and brighten their hope in the perfect reunion and blessedness of the heavens, is to increase the firmness of their faith in, and the depth of their apprehension of, the sacrifice of the Cross. If the Cross demands the Crown, then our surest way to realise as certain our own possession of that Crown is to cling very close to that Cross. The more we look backwards to it the more will it fling its light into all the dark places that are in front of us, and flush the heavens up to the seventh and beyond, with the glories that stream from it. Hold fast by the Cross, and the more fully, believingly, joyously, unflinchingly, we recognise in it the foundation of our salvation, the more gladly, clearly, operatively, shall we cherish the hope that 'the headstone shall be brought forth with shoutings,' and that the imperfect symbolical communion of earth will grow and greaten into complete and real union in eternal bliss.

Let me urge, then, this, that, as a matter of fact, a faith in eternal glory goes with and fluctuates in the same degree and manner as does the faith in the past sacrifice that Christ has made. He, and He alone, as I believe, turns nebulae into solidity, and makes of the more or less tremulous anticipation of a more or less dim and distant future, a calm, still certainty. We know that He will come because, and in proportion as, we believe that He has come. Keep these two things, then, always together, the memory and the hope. They stand like two great piers, one on either side of a narrow, dark glen, and suspended from them is stretched the bridge, along which the happy pilgrims may travel and enter into rest.

II. And now, let us turn for a moment to the lovely vision of that future which is suggested by our text.

The truest way, I was going to say the only way, by which we can have any conceptions of a condition of being of which we have no experience, is to fall back upon the experiences which we have, and use them as symbols and metaphors. The curtain is the picture. So our Lord here, in accordance with the necessary limitations of our human knowledge, contents Himself with using what lay at His hand, and taking it as giving faint shadows and metaphorical suggestions as to spiritual blessedness yonder.

There is one other way, as it seems to me, by which we can in any measure body forth to ourselves that unknown condition of things, and that is to fall back upon our present experiences in another fashion, and negative all of them which involve pain and limitation and incompleteness. There shall be no night—no sorrow—no tears—no sighing, and the like. These negatives of the strong and stinging griefs and limitations of the present are perhaps our second-best way of coming to some prophetic vision of that great future.

Remembering, then, that we are dealing with pure metaphor, and that the exact translation of the metaphor into reality is not yet possible for us, let us take one or two very plain thoughts out of this great saying—'Until I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom.'

Then, we have to think of the completion of the Christian life beyond, which is also the completion of the results of Christ's death on the Cross, as being, according to the very frequent metaphor both of the Old and the New Testament, a prolonged festival. I do not need to speak of the details of the thoughts that thence emerge. Let me sum them up as briefly as may be. They include the satisfaction of every desire and

the nourishment of all strength, and food for every faculty. When we think of the hungry hearts that all men carry, and how true it is that even the wisest and the holiest of us are 'spending our money for that which is not bread, and our labour for that which satisfieth not'; when we think of how the choicest foods that life can provide, even for the noblest hunger of noble hearts, are too often to us but as a feeding on ashes that will leave grit between the teeth and a foul taste upon the palate, surely it is blessed to think that we may, after all life's disappointments, cherish the hope of a perfect fruition, and that yonder, if not here, it will be fully true that 'God never sends mouths but He sends meat to feed them.' That is not so in this world, for we all carry hungers which impel us forward to nobler living, and which it would not be good for us to have satisfied here. But, unless the whole universe is a godless chaos, there must be somewhere a state in which a man shall have all that he wants, and shall want only what he ought.

The emblem of a feast suggests also society. The solitary travellers who have been toiling and moiling through the desert all the day long, snatching up a hasty mouthful as they march, and lonely many a time, come together at last, and sit together there joyous and united. Deep down in our hearts some of us have gashes that always bleed. We know losses and loneliness, and we can feel, I hope, how blessed is the thought that all the wanderers shall sit there together, and rejoice in each other's communion, 'and so shall *we* ever be with the Lord.'

But besides satisfaction and society the figure suggests repose. That rest is not indolence, for we have to carry other metaphors with us in order to come to

the full significance of this one, and the festal imagery is not all that we have to take into account; for we read, 'I grant unto you a kingdom, and ye shall sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel,' as well as 'ye shall eat and drink with Me at My table in My kingdom.' So repose, which is consistent and co-existent with the intensest activity, is the great hope that comes out of these metaphors. But for many of us—I suppose for all of us elderly people—who are about weary of work and worry, there is no deeper hope than the hope of rest. 'I have had labour enough for one,' says one of our poets. And I think there is something in most of our hearts that echoes that and rejoices to hear that, after the long march, 'ye shall sit with Me at My table.'

But besides satisfaction, society, and rest, the figure suggests gladness. Wine is the emblem of the joyous side of a feast, just as bread is the emblem of the necessary nourishment. And it is *new* wine; joy raised to a higher power, transformed and glorified; and yet the old emotion in a new form. As for that gladness, 'eye hath not seen, neither hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive, the things that God hath prepared for them that love Him.' Only all we weary, heavy-laden, saddened, anxious, disappointed, tormented people may hope for these festal joys, if we are Christ's. The feast will last when all the troubles and the cares which helped us to it are dead and buried and forgotten.

These four things, brethren—satisfaction, society, rest, new gladness—are proclaimed and prophesied to each of us, if we will, by this memorial rite.

Again, there comes from this aspect of the Communion the thought that the blessed condition of the

Christian soul hereafter is a feast on a sacrifice. We must distinguish between the sense in which our Lord drinks with us, and the sense in which we alone partake of that feast of which He provides the viands. But just as in the symbolic ordinance of the Communion the very essence of it is that what was offered as sacrifice is now incorporated into the participant's spiritual being, and becomes part of himself, and the life of his life, so, in the future, all the blessedness of the clustered and constellated joys of that life, which is one eternal festival, shall arise from the reception into perfected spirits with ever-growing greatness and blessedness of the Christ that died and ever lives for them. That heavenly glory, to its highest pinnacle of aspiration, to its most rapt completeness of gladness, is all the consequence of Christ's death on the Cross. That death, which we commemorate, is the procuring cause of man's entrance into bliss, and that death is the subject of the continual, grateful remembrance of the saints in the seventh heaven of their glory. Life yonder, as all true life here, consists in taking into ourselves the life of Jesus Christ, and the law for heaven is the same as the law for earth, 'He that eateth Me, even he shall live by Me.'

Lastly, the conception of the future for Christian souls arising from this aspect of the Lord's Supper is that it is not only a feast, and a feast on a sacrifice, but that it is a feast with the King.

'*With you* I will drink it.' Brethren, we pass beyond metaphor when we gather up and condense all the vague brightness and glories of that perfect future into this one rapturous, overwhelming, all-embracing thought: 'So shall we ever be with the Lord.' I could almost wish that Christian people had no other thought

of that future than this, for surely in its grand simplicity, in its ineffable depth, there lie the germs of every blessedness. How poor all the material emblems are, of which sensuous imaginations make so much, when compared with that hope! As the good old hymn has it, which to me says more, in its bold simplicity, than all the sentimental enlargements of Scriptural metaphors which some people admire so much—

‘ It is enough that Christ knows all,
And I shall be with Him.’

Strange that He says, ‘I will drink it *with you*.’ Does He need sustenance? Does He need any external things in order to make His feast? No! and Yes! ‘I will sup with Him’ as well as ‘He with me.’ And, surely, His meat and drink are the love, the loyalty, the obedience, the receptiveness, the society of His redeemed children. ‘The joy of the Lord’ comes] from ‘seeing of the travail of His soul,’ and His servants do enter into that joy in deep and wondrous fashion. We not only shall live on Christ, but He Himself puts to His own lips the chalice that He commends to ours, and in marvellous condescension to, and identity with, our glorified humanity drinks with us the ‘new wine’ in the Father’s kingdom.

GETHSEMANE, THE OIL-PRESS

‘ Then cometh Jesus with them unto a place called Gethsemane, and saith unto the disciples, Sit ye here, while I go and pray yonder. 37. And He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be sorrowful and very heavy. 38. Then saith He unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death: tarry ye here, and watch with Me. 39. And He went a little farther, and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, O My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me: nevertheless not as I will, but as Thou wilt. 40. And He cometh unto the

disciples, and findeth them asleep, and saith unto Peter, What, could ye no watch with Me one hour? 41. Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak. 42. He went away again the second time, and prayed, saying, O My Father, if this cup may not pass away from Me, except I drink it, Thy will be done. 43. And He came and found them asleep again: for their eyes were heavy. 44. And He left them, and went away again, and prayed the third time, saying the same words. 45. Then cometh He to His disciples, and saith unto them, Sleep on now, and take your rest: behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. 46. Rise, let us be going: behold, he is at hand that doth betray Me.—MATT. xxvi. 36-46.

ONE shrinks from touching this incomparable picture of unexampled sorrow, for fear lest one's finger-marks should stain it. There is no place here for picturesque description, which tries to mend the gospel stories by dressing them in to-day's fashions, nor for theological systematisers and analysers of the sort that would 'botanise upon their mother's grave.' We must put off our shoes, and feel that we stand on holy ground. Though loving eyes saw something of Christ's agony, He did not let them come beside Him, but withdrew into the shadow of the gnarled olives, as if even the moonbeams must not look too closely on the mystery of such grief. We may go as near as love was allowed to go, but stop where it was stayed, while we reverently and adoringly listen to what the Evangelist tells us of that unspeakable hour.

I. Mark the 'exceeding sorrow' of the Man of Sorrows. Somewhere on the western foot of Olivet lay the garden, named from an oil-press formerly or then in it, which was to be the scene of the holiest and sorest sorrow on which the moon, that has seen so much misery, has ever looked. Truly it was 'an oil-press,' in which 'the good olive' was crushed by the grip of unparalleled agony, and yielded precious oil, which has been poured into many a wound since then. Eight of the eleven are left at or near the entrance, while He passes deeper into the shadows with the three. They had been witnesses of His prayers once before, on the

slopes of Hermon, when He was transfigured before them. They are now to see a no less wonderful revelation of His glory in His filial submission. There is something remarkable in Matthew's expression, 'He began to be sorrowful,'—as if a sudden wave of emotion, breaking over His soul, had swept His human sensibilities before it. The strange word translated by the Revisers 'sore troubled' is of uncertain derivation, and may possibly be simply intended to intensify the idea of sorrow; but more probably it adds another element, which Bishop Lightfoot describes as 'the confused, restless, half-distracted state which is produced by physical derangement or mental distress.' A storm of agitation and bewilderment broke His calm, and forced from His patient lips, little wont to speak of His own emotions, or to seek for sympathy, the unutterably pathetic cry, 'My soul is exceeding sorrowful'—compassed about with sorrow, as the word means—'even unto death.' No feeble explanation of these words does justice to the abyss of woe into which they let us dimly look. They tell the fact, that, a little more and the body would have sunk under the burden. He knew the limits of human endurance, for 'all things were made by Him,' and, knowing it, He saw that He had grazed the very edge. Out of the darkness He reaches a hand to feel for the grasp of a friend, and piteously asks these humble lovers to stay beside Him, not that they could help Him to bear the weight, but that their presence had some solace in it. His agony must be endured alone, therefore He bade them tarry there; but He desired to have them at hand, therefore He went but 'a little forward.' They could not bear it with Him, but they could 'watch with' Him, and that poor comfort is all He asks. No word came from them.

They were, no doubt, awed into silence, as the truest sympathy is used to be, in the presence of a great grief. Is it permitted us to ask what were the fountains of these bitter floods that swept over Christ's sinless soul? Was the mere physical shrinking from death all? If so, we may reverently say that many a maiden and old man, who drew all their fortitude from Jesus, have gone to stake or gibbet for His sake, with a calm which contrasts strangely with His agitation. Gethsemane is robbed of its pathos and nobleness if that be all. But it was not all. Rather it was the least bitter of the components of the cup. What lay before Him was not merely death, but the death which was to atone for a world's sin, and in which, therefore, the whole weight of sin's consequences was concentrated. 'The Lord hath made to meet on Him the iniquities of us all'; that is the one sufficient explanation of this infinitely solemn and tender scene. Unless we believe that, we shall find it hard to reconcile His agitation in Gethsemane with the perfection of His character as the captain of 'the noble army of martyrs.'

II. Note the prayer of filial submission. Matthew does not tell us of the sweat falling audibly and heavily, and sounding to the three like slow blood-drops from a wound, nor of the strengthening angel, but he gives us the prostrate form, and the threefold prayer, renewed as each moment of calm, won by it, was again broken in upon by a fresh wave of emotion. Thrice He had to leave the disciples, and came back, a calm conqueror; and twice the enemy rallied and returned to the assault, and was at last driven finally from the field by the power of prayer and submission. The three Synoptics differ in their report of our Lord's words, but all mean the same thing in substance; and it is obvious that

much more must have been spoken than they report. Possibly what we have is only the fragments that reached the three before they fell asleep. In any case, Jesus was absent from them on each occasion long enough to allow of their doing so.

Three elements are distinguishable in our Lord's prayer. There is, first, the sense of Sonship, which underlies all, and was never more clear than at that awful moment. Then there is the recoil from 'the cup,' which natural instinct could not but feel, though sinlessly. The flesh shrank from the Cross, which else had been no suffering; and if no suffering, then had been no atonement. His manhood would not have been like ours, nor His sorrows our pattern, if He had not thus drawn back, in His sensitive humanity, from the awful prospect now so near. But natural instinct is one thing, and the controlling will another. However currents may have tossed the vessel, the firm hand at the helm never suffered them to change her course. The will, which in this prayer He seems so strangely to separate from the Father's, even in the act of submission, was the will which wishes, not that which resolves. His fixed purpose to die for the world's sin never wavered. The shrinking does not reach the point of absolutely and unconditionally asking that the cup might pass. Even in the act of uttering the wish, it is limited by that 'if it be possible,' which can only mean—possible, in view of the great purpose for which He came. That is to be accomplished, at any cost; and unless it can be accomplished though the cup be withdrawn, He does not even wish, much less will, that it should be withdrawn. So, the third element in the prayer is the utter resignation to the Father's will, in which submission He found peace, as we do.

He prayed His way to perfect calm, which is ever the companion of perfect self-surrender to God. They who cease from their own works do 'enter into rest.' All the agitations which had come storming in massed battalions against Him are defeated by it. They have failed to shake His purpose, they now fail even to disturb His peace. So, victorious from the dreadful conflict, and at leisure of heart to care for others, He can go back to the disciples. But even whilst seeking to help them, a fresh wave of suffering breaks in on His calm, and once again He leaves them to renew the struggle. The instinctive shrinking reasserts itself, and, though overcome, is not eradicated. But the second prayer is yet more rooted in acquiescence than the first. It shows that He had not lost what He had won by the former; for it, as it were, builds on that first supplication, and accepts as answer to its contingent petition the consciousness, accompanying the calm, that it was not possible for the cup to pass from Him. The sense of Sonship underlies the complete resignation of the second prayer as of the first. It has no wish but God's will, and is the voluntary offering of Himself. Here He is both Priest and Sacrifice, and offers the victim with this prayer of consecration. So once more He triumphs, because once more, and yet more completely, He submits, and accepts the Cross. For Him, as for us, the Cross accepted ceases to be a pain, and the cup is no more bitter when we are content to drink it. Once more in fainter fashion the enemy came on, casting again his spent arrows, and beaten back by the same weapon. The words were the same, because no others could have expressed more perfectly the submission which was the heart of His prayers and the condition of His victory.

Christ's prayer, then, was not for the passing of the cup, but that the will of God might be done in and by Him, and 'He was heard in that He feared,' not by being exempted from the Cross, but by being strengthened through submission for submission. So His agony is the pattern of all true prayer, which must ever deal with our wishes, as He did with His instinctive shrinking,—present them wrapped in an 'if it be possible,' and followed by a 'nevertheless.' The meaning of prayer is not to force our wills on God's, but to bend our wills to His; and that prayer is really answered of which the issue is our calm readiness for all that He lays upon us.

III. Note the sad and gentle remonstrance with the drowsy three. 'The sleep of the disciples, and of these disciples, and of all three, and such an overpowering sleep, remains even after Luke's explanation, "for sorrow," a psychological riddle' (*Meyer*). It is singularly parallel with the sleep of the same three at the Transfiguration—an event which presents the opposite pole of our Lord's experiences, and yields so many antithetical parallels to Gethsemane. No doubt the tension of emotion, which had lasted for many hours, had worn them out; but, if weariness had weighed down their eyelids, love should have kept them open. Such sleep of such disciples may have been a riddle, but it was also a crime, and augured imperfect sympathy. Gentle surprise and the pain of disappointed love are audible in the question, addressed to Peter especially, as he had promised so much, but meant for all. This was all that Jesus got in answer to His yearning for sympathy. 'I looked for some to take pity, but there was none.' Those who loved Him most lay curled in dead slumber within earshot of His prayers. If ever

a soul tasted the desolation of utter loneliness, that suppliant beneath the olives tasted it. But how little of the pain escapes His lips! The words but hint at the slightness of their task compared with His, at the brevity of the strain on their love, and at the companionship which ought to have made sleep impossible. May we not see in Christ's remonstrance a word for all? For us, too, the task of keeping awake in the enchanted ground is light, measured against His, and the time is short, and we have Him to keep us company in the watch, and every motive of grateful love should make it easy; but, alas, how many of us sleep a drugged and heavy slumber!

The gentle remonstrance soon passes over into counsel as gentle. Watchfulness and prayer are inseparable. The one discerns dangers, the other arms against them. Watchfulness keeps us prayerful, and prayerfulness keeps us watchful. To watch without praying is presumption, to pray without watching is hypocrisy. The eye that sees clearly the facts of life will turn upwards from its scanning of the snares and traps, and will not look in vain. These two are the indispensable conditions of victorious encountering of temptation. Fortified by them, we shall not 'enter into' it, though we encounter it. The outward trial will remain, but its power to lead us astray will vanish. It will still be danger or sorrow, but it will not be temptation; and we shall pass through it, as a sunbeam through foul air, untainted, and keeping heaven's radiance. That is a lesson for a wider circle than the sleepy three.

It is followed by words which would need a volume to expound in all their depth and width of application, but which are primarily a reason for the preceding counsel, as well as a loving apology for the disciples'

sleep. Christ is always glad to give us credit for even imperfect good; His eye, which sees deeper than ours, sees more lovingly, and is not hindered from marking the willing spirit by recognising weak flesh. But these words are not to be made a pillow for indolent acquiescence in the limitations which the flesh imposes on the spirit. He may take merciful count of these, and so may we, in judging others, but it is fatal to plead them at the bar of our own consciences. Rather they should be a spur to our watchfulness and to our prayer. We need these because the flesh is weak, still more because, in its weakness toward good, it is strong to evil. Such exercise will give governing power to the spirit, and enable it to impose its will on the reluctant flesh. If we watch and pray, the conflict between these two elements in the renewed nature will tend to unity and peace by the supremacy of the spirit; if we do not, it will tend to cease by the unquestioned tyranny of the flesh. In one or other direction our lives are tending.

Strange that such words had no effect. But so it was, and so deep was the apostles' sleep that Christ left them undisturbed the second time. The relapse is worse than the original disease. Sleep broken and resumed is more torpid and fatal than if it had not been interrupted. We do not know how long it lasted, though the whole period in the garden must have been measured by hours; but at last it was broken by the enigmatical last words of our Lord. The explanation of the direct opposition between the consecutive sentences, by taking the 'Sleep on now' as ironical, jars on one's reverence. Surely irony is out of keeping with the spirit of Christ then. Rather He bids them sleep on, since the hour is come, in sad recognition that the

need for their watchful sympathy is past, and with it the opportunity for their proved affection. It is said with a tone of contemplative melancholy, and is almost equivalent to 'too late, too late.' The memorable sermon of F. W. Robertson, on this text, rightly grasps the spirit of the first clause, when it dwells with such power on the thought of 'the irrevocable past' of wasted opportunities and neglected duty. But the sudden transition to the sharp, short command and broken sentences of the last verse is to be accounted for by the sudden appearance of the flashing lights of the band led by Judas, somewhere near at hand, in the valley. The mood of pensive reflection gives place to rapid decision. He summons them to arise, not for flight, but that He may go out to meet the traitor. Escape would have been easy. There was time to reach some sheltering fold of the hill in the darkness; but the prayer beneath the silver-grey olives had not been in vain, and these last words in Gethsemane throb with the Son's willingness to yield Himself up, and to empty to its dregs the cup which the Father had given Him.

THE LAST PLEADING OF LOVE

'And Jesus said unto him, Friend, wherefore art thou come?'—MATT. xxvi. 50.

WE are accustomed to think of the betrayer of our Lord as a kind of monster, whose crime is so mysterious in its atrocity as to put him beyond the pale of human sympathy. The awful picture which the great Italian poet draws of him as alone in hell, shunned even there, as guilty beyond all others, expresses the general feeling about him. And even the attempts which have been made to diminish the greatness of his guilt, by

supposing that his motive was only to precipitate Christ's assumption of His conquering Messianic power, are prompted by the same thought that such treason as his is all but inconceivable. I cannot but think that these attempts fail, and that the narratives of the Gospels oblige us to think of his crime as deliberate treachery. But even when so regarded, other emotions than wondering loathing should be excited by the awful story.

There had been nothing in his previous history to suggest such sin, as is proved by the disciples' question, when our Lord announced that one of them should betray Him. No suspicion lighted on him—no finger pointed to where he sat. But self-distrust asked, 'Lord, is it I?' and only love, pillowed on the Master's breast, and strong in the happy sense of His love, was sufficiently assured of its own constancy, to change the question into 'Lord! who is it?' The process of corruption was unseen by all eyes but Christ's. He came to his terrible pre-eminence in crime by slow degrees, and by paths which we may all tread. As for his guilt, that is in other hands than ours. As for his fate, let us copy the solemn and pitying reticence of Peter, and say, 'that he might go to *his own place*'—the place that belongs to him, and that he is fit for, wherever that may be. As for the growth and development of his sin, let us remember that 'we have all of us one human heart,' and that the possibilities of crime as dark are in us all. And instead of shuddering abhorrence at a sin that can scarcely be understood, and can never be repeated, let us be sure that whatever man has done, man may do, and ask with humble consciousness of our own deceitful hearts, 'Lord, is it I?'

These remarkable and solemn words of Christ, with

which He meets the treacherous kiss, appear to be a last appeal to Judas. They may possibly not be a question, as in our version—but an incomplete sentence, ‘What thou hast come to do’—leaving the implied command, ‘That do,’ unexpressed. They would then be very like other words which the betrayer had heard but an hour or two before, ‘That thou doest, do quickly.’ But such a rendering does not seem so appropriate to the circumstances as that which makes them a question, smiting on his heart and conscience, and seeking to tear away the veil of sophistications with which he had draped from his own eyes the hideous shape of his crime. And, if so, what a wonderful instance we have here of that long-suffering love. They are the last effort of the divine patience to win back even the traitor. They show us the wrestle between infinite mercy and a treacherous, sinful heart, and they bring into awful prominence the power which that heart has of rejecting the counsel of God against itself. I venture to use them now as suggesting these three things: the patience of Christ’s love; the pleading of Christ’s love; and the refusal of Christ’s love.

I. The patience of Christ’s love.

If we take no higher view of this most pathetic incident than that the words come from a man’s lips, even then all its beauty will not be lost. There are some sins against friendship in which the manner is harder to bear than the substance of the evil. It must have been a strangely mean and dastardly nature, as well as a coarse and cold one, that could think of fixing on the kiss of affection as the concerted sign to point out their victim to the legionaries. Many a man who could have planned and executed the treason would have shrunk from that. And many a man who could

have borne to be betrayed by his own familiar friend would have found that heartless insult worse to endure than the treason itself. But what a picture of perfect patience and unruffled calm we have here, in that the answer to the poisonous, hypocritical embrace was these moving words! The touch of the traitor's lips has barely left His cheek, but not one faint passing flush of anger tinges it. He is perfectly self-oblivious—absorbed in other thoughts, and among them in pity for the guilty wretch before Him. His words have no agitation in them, no instinctive recoil from the pollution of such a salutation. They have grave rebuke, but it is rebuke which derives its very force from the appeal to former companionship. Christ still recognises the ancient bond, and is true to it. He will still plead with this man who has been beside Him long; and though His heart be wounded yet He is not wroth, and He will not cast him off. If this were nothing more than a picture of human friendship it would stand alone, above all other records that the world cherishes in its inmost heart, of the love that never fails, and is not soon angry.

But we, I hope, dear brethren, think more loftily and more truly of our dear Lord than as simply a perfect manhood, the exemplar of all goodness. How He comes to be that, if He be not more than that, I do not understand, and I, for one, feel that my confidence in the flawless completeness of His human character lives or dies with my belief that He is the Eternal Word, God manifest in the flesh. Certainly we shall never truly grasp the blessed meaning of His life on earth until we look upon it all as the revelation of God. The tears of Christ are the pity of God. The gentleness of Jesus is the long-suffering of God. The tenderness of Jesus is

the love of God. 'He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father'; and all that life so beautiful but so anomalous as to be all but incredible, when we think of it as only the life of a man, glows with a yet fairer beauty, and corresponds with the nature which it expresses, when we think of it as being the declaration to us by the divine Son of the divine Father—our loftiest, clearest, and authentic revelation of God.

How that thought lifts these words before us into a still higher region! We are now in the presence of the solemn greatness of a divine love. If the meaning of this saying is what we have suggested, it is pathetic even in the lower aspect, but how infinitely that pathos is deepened when we view it in the higher!

Surely if ever there was a man who might have been supposed to be excluded from the love of God, it was Judas. Surely if ever there was a moment in a human life, when one might have supposed that even Christ's ever open heart would shut itself together against any one, it was this moment. But no, the betrayer in the very instant of his treason has that changeless tenderness lingering around him, and that merciful hand beckoning to him still.

And have we not a right to generalise this wonderful fact, and to declare its teaching to be—that the love of God is extended to us all, and cannot be made to turn away from us by any sins of ours? Sin is mighty; it can work endless evils on us; it can disturb and embitter all our relations with God; it can, as we shall presently have to point out, make it necessary for the tenderest 'grace of God to come disciplining'—to 'come with a rod,' just because it comes in 'the spirit of meekness.' But one thing it cannot do, and that is—make God cease to love us. I suppose all human

affection can be worn out by constant failure to evoke a response from cold hearts. I suppose that it can be so nipped by frosts, so constantly checked in blossoming, that it shrivels and dies. I suppose that constant ingratitude, constant indifference can turn the warmest springs of our love to a river of ice. 'Can a mother forget her child?—Yea, she may forget.' But we have to do with a God, whose love is His very being; who loves us not for reasons in us but in Himself; whose love is eternal and boundless as all His nature; whose love, therefore, cannot be turned away by our sin—but abides with us for ever, and is granted to every soul of man. Dear brethren, we cannot believe too firmly, we cannot trust too absolutely, we cannot proclaim too broadly that blessed thought, without which we have no hope to feed on for ourselves, or to share with our fellows—the universal love of God in Christ.

Is there a *worst* man on earth at this moment? If there be, he, too, has a share in that love. Harlots and thieves, publicans and sinners, leprous outcasts, and souls tormented by unclean spirits, the wrecks of humanity whom decent society and respectable Christianity passes by with averted head and uplifted hands, criminals on the gibbet with the rope round their necks—and those who are as hopeless as any of these, self-complacent formalists and 'Gospel-hardened professors'—all have a place in that heart. And that, not as undistinguished members of a class, but as separate souls, singly the objects of God's knowledge and love. He loves all, because He loves each. We are not massed together in His view, nor in His regard. He does not lose the details in the whole; as we, looking on some great crowd of upturned faces, are

conscious of all but recognise no single one. He does not love a class—a world—but He loves the single souls that make it up—you and me, and every one of the millions that we throw together in the vague phrase, 'the race.' Let us individualise that love in our thoughts as it individualises us in its outflow—and make our own the 'exceeding broad' promises, which include us, too. 'God loves *me*; Christ gave Himself for *me*. I have a place in that royal, tender heart.'

Nor should any sin make us doubt this. He loved us with exceeding love, even when we were 'dead in trespasses.' He did not begin to love because of anything in us; He will not cease because of anything in us. We change; 'He abideth faithful, He cannot deny Himself.' As the sunshine pours down as willingly and abundantly on filth and dunghills, as on gold that glitters in its beam, and jewels that flash back its lustre, so the light and warmth of that unsetting and unexhausted source of life pours down 'on the unthankful and on the good.' The great ocean clasps some black and barren crag that frowns against it, as closely as with its waves it kisses some fair strand enamelled with flowers and fragrant with perfumes. So that sea of love in which we 'live, and move, and have our being,' encircles the worst with abundant flow. He Himself sets us the pattern, which to imitate is to be the children of 'our Father which is in heaven,' in that He loves His enemies, blessing them that curse, and doing good to them that hate. He Himself is what He has enjoined us to be, in that He feeds His enemies when they hunger, and when they thirst gives them drink, heaping coals of fire on their heads, and seeking to kindle in them thereby the glow of answering love, not being overcome of their evil, so that He repays hate with

hate and scorn with scorn, but in patient continuance of loving kindness seeking to overcome evil with good. He is Himself that 'charity' which 'is not easily provoked, is not soon angry, beareth all things, hopeth all things, and never faileth.' His love is mightier than all our sins, and waits not on our merits, nor is turned away by our iniquities. 'God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.'

II. Then, secondly, we have here—the pleading of Christ's patient love.

I have been trying to say as broadly and strongly as I can, that our sins do not turn away the love of God in Christ from us. The more earnestly we believe and proclaim that, the more needful is it to set forth distinctly—and that not as limiting, but as explaining the truth—the other thought, that the sin which does not avert, does modify the expression of, the love of God. Man's sin compels Him to do what the prophet calls his 'strange work'—the work which is not dear to His heart, nor natural, if one may so say, to His hands—His work of judgment.

The love of Christ has to come to sinful men with patient pleading and remonstrance, that it may enter their hearts and give its blessings. We are familiar with a modern work of art in which that long-suffering appeal is wonderfully portrayed. He who is the Light of the world stands, girded with the royal mantle clasped with the priestly breastplate, bearing in His hand the lamp of truth, and there, amidst the dew of night and the rank hemlock, He pleads for entrance at the closed door which has no handle on its outer side, and is hinged to open only from within. 'I stand

at the door and knock. If any man open the door, I will come in.'

And in this incident before us, we see represented not only the endless patience of God's pitying love, but the method which it needs to take in order to reach the heart.

There is an appeal to the traitor's heart, and an appeal to his conscience. Christ would have him think of the relations that have so long subsisted between them; and He would have him think, too, of the real nature of the deed he is doing, or, perhaps, of the motives that impel him. The grave, sad word, by which He addresses him, is meant to smite upon his heart. The sharp question which He puts to him is meant to wake up his conscience; and both taken together represent the two chief classes of remonstrance which He brings to bear upon us all—the two great batteries from which He assails the fortress of our sins.

There is first, then—Christ's appeal to the heart. He tries to make Judas feel the considerations that should restrain him. The appellation by which our Lord addresses him does not in the original convey quite so strongly the idea of amity, as our word 'Friend' does. It is not the same as that which He had used a few hours before in the upper chamber, when He said, 'Henceforth I call you not servants, but I have called you friends.—Ye are My friends if ye do whatsoever I command you.' It is the same as is put into the lips of the Lord of the vineyard, remonstrating with his jealous labourer, 'Friend, I do thee no wrong.' There is a tone, then, of less intimate association and graver rebuke in it than in that name with which He honours those who make His will theirs, and His word the law

of their lives. It does not speak of close confidence, but it does suggest companionship and kindness on the part of the speaker. There is rebuke in it, but it is rebuke which derives its whole force from the remembrance of ancient concord and connection. Our Lord would recall to the memory of the betrayer the days in which they had taken sweet counsel together. It is as if He had said—‘Hast thou forgotten all our former intercourse? Thou hast eaten My bread, thou hast been Mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted—canst thou lift up thy heel against Me?’ What happy hours of quiet fellowship on many a journey, of rest together after many a day of toil, what forgotten thoughts of the loving devotion and the glow of glad consecration that he had once felt, what a long series of proofs of Christ’s gentle goodness and meek wisdom should have sprung again to remembrance at such an appeal! And how black and dastardly would his guilt have seemed if once he had ventured to remember what unexampled friendship he was sinning against!

Is it not so with us all, dear brethren? All our evils are betrayals of Christ, and all our betrayals of Christ are sins against a perfect friendship and an unvaried goodness. We, too, have sat at His table, heard His wisdom, seen His miracles, listened to His pleadings, have had a place in His heart; and if we turn away from Him to do our own pleasure, and sell His love for a handful of silver, we need not cherish shuddering abhorrence against that poor wretch who gave Him up to the cross. Oh! if we could see aright, we should see our Saviour’s meek, sad face standing between us and each of our sins, with warning in the pitying eyes, and His pleading voice would sound in our ears, appealing to us by loving remembrances of His ancient friendship,

to turn from the evil which is treason against Him, and wounds His heart as much as it harms ours. Take heed lest in condemning the traitor we doom ourselves. If we flush into anger at the meanness of his crime, and declare, 'He shall surely die,' do we not hear a prophet's voice saying to each, 'Thou art the man'?

The loving hand laid on the heart-strings is followed by a strong stroke on conscience. The heart vibrates most readily in answer to gentle touches: the conscience, in answer to heavier, as the breath that wakes the chords of an Æolian harp would pass silent through the brass of a trumpet. 'Wherefore art thou come?'—if to be taken as a question at all, which, as I have said, seems most natural, is either, 'What hast thou come to do?'—or, 'Why hast thou come to do it?' Perhaps it may be fairly taken as including both. But, at all events, it is clearly an appeal to Judas to make him see what his conduct really is in itself, and possibly in its motive too. And this is the constant effort of the love of Christ—to get us to say to ourselves the real name of what we are about.

We cloak our sins from ourselves with many wrappings, as they swathe a mummy in voluminous folds. And of these veils, one of the thickest is woven by our misuse of words to describe the very same thing by different names, according as we do it, or another man does it. Almost all moral actions—the thing to which we can apply the words right or wrong—have two or more names, of which the one suggests the better and the other the worse side of the action. For instance what in ourselves we call prudent regard for our own interest, we call, in our neighbour, narrow selfishness; what in ourselves is laudable economy, in him is miserable avarice. We are impetuous, he is passionate; we

generous, he lavish ; we are clever men of business, he is a rogue ; we sow our wild oats and are gay, he is dissipated. So we cheat ourselves by more than half-transparent veils of our own manufacture, which we fling round the ugly features and misshapen limbs of these sins of ours, and we are made more than ever their bond-slaves thereby.

Therefore, it is the office of the truest love to force us to look at the thing as it is. It would go some way to keep a man from some of his sins if he would give the thing its real name. A distinct conscious statement to oneself, 'Now I am going to tell a lie'—'This that I am doing is fraud'—'This emotion that I feel creeping with devilish warmth about the roots of my heart is revenge'—and so on, would surely startle us sometimes, and make us fling the gliding poison from our breast, as a man would a snake that he found just lifting its head from the bosom of his robe. Suppose Judas had answered the question, and, gathering himself up, had looked his Master in the face, and said—'What have I come for?' 'I have come to betray Thee for thirty pieces of silver!' Do you not think that putting his guilt into words might have moved even him to more salutary feelings than the remorse which afterwards accompanied his tardy discernment of what he *had* done? So the patient love of Christ comes rebuking, and smiting hard on conscience. 'The grace of God that bringeth salvation to all men hath appeared disciplining'—and His hand is never more gentle than when it plucks away the films with which we hide our sins from ourselves, and shows us the 'rottenness and dead men's bones' beneath the whited walls of the sepulchres and the velvet of the coffins.

He must begin with rebukes that He may advance to

blessing. He must teach us what is separating us from Him that, learning it, we may flee to His grace to help us. There is no entrance for the truest gifts of His patient love into any heart that has not yielded to His pleading remonstrance, and in lowly penitence has answered His question as He would have us answer it, 'Friend and Lover of my soul, I have sinned against Thy tender heart, against the unexampled patience of Thy love. I have departed from Thee and betrayed Thee. Blessed be Thy merciful voice which hath taught me what I have done! Blessed be Thine unwearied goodness which still bends over me! Raise me fallen! forgive me treacherous! Keep me safe and happy, ever true and near to Thee!'

III. Notice the possible rejection of the pleading of Christ's patient love.

Even that appeal was vain. Here we are confronted with a plain instance of man's mysterious and awful power of 'frustrating the counsel of God'—of which one knows not whether is greater, the difficulty of understanding how a finite will *can* rear itself against the Infinite Will, or the mournful mystery that a creature should desire to set itself against its loving Maker and Benefactor. But strange as it is, yet so it is; and we can turn round upon Sovereign Fatherhood bidding us to its service, and say, '*I will not.*' He pleads with us, and we can resist His pleadings. He holds out the mercies of His hands and the gifts of His grace, and we can reject them. We cannot cease to be the objects of His love, but we can refuse to be the recipients of its most precious gifts. We can bar our hearts against it. Then, of what avail is it to us? To go back to an earlier illustration, the sunshine pours down and floods a world, what does that matter to us

if we have fastened up shutters on all our windows, and barred every crevice through which the streaming gladness can find its way? We shall grope at noontide as in the dark within our gloomy house, while our neighbours have light in theirs. What matters it though we float in the great ocean of the divine love, if with pitch and canvas we have carefully closed every aperture at which the flood can enter? A hermetically closed jar, plunged in the Atlantic, will be as dry inside as if it were lying on the sand of the desert. It is possible to perish of thirst within sight of the fountain. It is possible to separate ourselves from the love of God, not to separate the love of God from ourselves.

The incident before us carries another solemn lesson—how simple and easy a thing it is to repel that pleading love. What did Judas do? Nothing; it was enough. He merely held his peace—no more. There was no need for him to break out with oaths and curses, to reject his Lord with wild words. Silence was sufficient. And for us—no more is required. We have but to be passive; we have but to stand still. Not to accept is to refuse; non-submission is rebellion. We do not need to emphasise our refusal by any action—no need to lift our clenched hands in defiance. We have simply to put them behind our backs or to keep them folded. The closed hand must remain an empty hand. ‘He that believeth not is condemned.’ My friend, remember that, when Christ pleads and draws, to do nothing is to oppose, and to delay is to refuse. It is a very easy matter to ruin your soul. You have simply to keep still when He says ‘Come unto Me’—to keep your eyes fixed where they were, when He says, ‘Look unto Me, and be ye saved,’ and all the rest will follow of itself.

Notice, too, how the appeal of Christ’s love hardens

where it does not soften. That gentle voice drove the traitor nearer the verge over which he fell into a gulf of despair. It should have drawn him closer to the Lord, but he recoiled from it, and was thereby brought nearer destruction. Every pleading of Christ's grace, whether by providences, or by books, or by His own word, does something with us. It is never vain. Either it melts or it hardens. The sun either scatters the summer morning mists, or it rolls them into heavier folds, from whose livid depths the lightning will be flashing by mid-day. You cannot come near the most inadequate exhibition of the pardoning love of Christ without being either drawn closer to Him or driven further from Him. Each act of rejection prepares the way for another, which will be easier, and adds another film to the darkness which covers your eyes, another layer to the hardness which incrusts your hearts.

Again, that silence, so eloquent and potent in its influence, was probably the silence of a man whose conscience was convicted while his will was unchanged. Such a condition is possible. It points to solemn thoughts, and to deep mysteries in man's awful nature. He knew that he was wrong, he had no excuse, his deed was before him in some measure in its true character, and yet he would not give it up. Such a state, if constant and complete, presents the most frightful picture we can frame of a soul. That a man shall not be able to say, 'I did it ignorantly'; that Christ shall not be able to ground His intercession on, 'They know not what they do'; that with full knowledge of the true nature of the deed, there shall be no wavering of the determination to do it—we may well turn with terror from such an awful abyss. But let us remember that, whether such a condition in its com-

pleteness is conceivable or not, at all events we may approach it indefinitely; and we do approach it by every sin, and by every refusal to yield to the love that would touch our consciences and fill our hearts.

Have you ever noticed what a remarkable verbal correspondence there is between these words of our text, and some other very solemn ones of Christ's? The question that He puts into the lips of the king who came in to see his guests is, '*Friend, how camest thou in hither, not having on a wedding garment?*' The question asked on earth shall be repeated again at last. The silence which once indicated a convinced conscience and an unchanged will may at that day indicate both of these and hopelessness beside. The clear vision of the divine love, if it do not flood the heart with joy and evoke the bliss of answering love, may fill it with bitterness. It is possible that the same revelation of the same grace may be the heaven of heaven to those who welcome it, and the pain of hell to those who turn from it. It is possible that love believed and received may be life, and love recognised and rejected may be death. It is possible that the vision of the same face may make some break forth with the rapturous hymn, '*Lo, this is our God, we have waited for Him!*' and make others call on the hills to fall on them and cover them from its brightness.

But let us not end with such words. Rather, dear brethren, let us yield to His patient beseechings; let Him teach us our evil and our sin. Listen to His great love who invites us to plead, and promises to pardon—'*Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.*'

THE REAL HIGH PRIEST AND HIS COUNTERFEIT

' And they that had laid hold on Jesus led Him away to Caiaphas the high priest, where the scribes and the elders were assembled. 58. But Peter followed Him afar off unto the high priest's palace, and went in, and sat with the servants, to see the end. 59. Now the chief priests, and elders, and all the council, sought false witness against Jesus, to put Him to death ; 60. But found none : yea, though many false witnesses came, yet found they none. At the last came two false witnesses, 61. And said, This fellow said, I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to build it in three days. 62. And the high priest arose, and said unto Him, Answerest Thou nothing? what is it which these witness against Thee? 63. But Jesus held His peace. And the high priest answered and said unto Him, I adjure Thee by the living God, that Thou tell us whether Thou be the Christ, the Son of God. 64. Jesus saith unto him, Thou hast said : nevertheless I say unto you, Hereafter shall ye see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven. 65. Then the high priest rent his clothes, saying, He hath spoken blasphemy ; what further need have we of witnesses? behold, now ye have heard His blasphemy. 66. What think ye? They answered and said, He is guilty of death. 67. Then did they spit in His face, and buffeted Him ; and others smote Him with the palms of their hands, 68. Saying, Prophecy unto us, Thou Christ, Who is he that smote Thee? —MATT. xxvi. 57-68.

JOHN'S Gospel tells us that Jesus was brought before 'Annas first,' probably in the same official priestly residence as Caiaphas, his son-in-law, occupied. That preliminary examination brought out nothing to incriminate the prisoner, and was flagrantly illegal, being an attempt to entrap Him into self-accusing statements. It was baffled by Jesus being silent first, and subsequently taking His stand on the undeniable principle that a charge must be sustained by evidence, not based on self-accusation. Annas, having made nothing of this strange criminal, 'sent Him bound unto Caiaphas.'

A meeting of the Sanhedrin had been hastily summoned in the dead of night, which was itself an illegality. Now Jesus stands before the poor shadow of a judicial tribunal, which, though it was all that Rome had left a conquered people, was still entitled to sit in judgment on Him. Strange inversion, and awful position for these formalists! And with sad

persistence of bitter prejudice they proceeded to try the prisoner, all unaware that it was themselves, not Him, that they were trying.

They began wrongly, and betrayed their animus at once. They were sitting there to inquire whether Jesus was guilty or no; they had made up their minds beforehand that He was, and their effort now was but to manufacture some thin veil of legality for a judicial murder. So they 'sought false witness, . . . that they might put Him to death.' Matthew simply says that no evidence sufficient for the purpose was forthcoming; Mark adds that the weak point was that the lies contradicted each other. Christ's presence has a strange, solemn power of unmasking our falsehoods, both of thought and deed, and it is hard to speak evil of Him before His face. If His calumniators were confused when He stood as Prisoner, what will they be when He sits as a Judge?

Only Matthew and Mark tell us of the two witnesses whose twisted version of the word about 'destroying the Temple and rebuilding it in three days' seemed to Caiaphas serious enough to require an answer. Their mistake was one which might have been made in good faith, but none the less was their travesty 'false witness.' Their version of His great word shows how easily the teaching of a lofty soul, passed through the popular brain, is degraded, and made to mean the opposite of what he had meant by it. For the destruction of the Temple had appeared in the saying as the Jews' work, and Jesus had presented Himself in it as the Restorer, not the Destroyer, of the Temple and of all that it symbolised. We destroy, He rebuilds. The murder of Jesus was the suicide of the nation. Caiaphas and his council were even now pulling down the Temple.

And that murder was the destruction, so far as men could effect it, of the true 'Temple of His body,' in which the fulness of the Godhead dwelt, and which was more gloriously reconstituted in the Resurrection. The risen Christ rears the true temple on earth, for through Him the Holy Ghost dwells in His Church, which is collectively 'the Temple,' and in all believing spirits, which are individually 'the temples' of God. So the false witnesses distorted into a lie a great truth. The Incarnate Word was dumb all the while. He 'was still and refrained' Himself. It was the silence of the King before a lawless tribunal of rebels, of patient meekness, 'as a sheep before her shearers'; of innocence that will not stoop to defend itself from groundless accusations; of infinite pity and forbearing love, which sees that it cannot win, but will not smite. Jesus is still silent, but one day, 'with the breath of His lips shall He slay the wicked.' Caiaphas seems to have been annoyed as well as surprised at Jesus' silence, for there is a trace of irritation, as at 'contempt of court,' in his words. But our Lord's continued silence appears to have somewhat awed him, and the dawning consciousness of his dignity is, perhaps, the reason for the high priest's casting aside all the foolery of false witnessing, and coming at last to the real point,—the Messianic claims of Jesus.

Caiaphas was doing his duty as high priest in inquiring into such claims, but he was somewhat late in the day, and he had made up his mind before he inquired. What he wished to get was a plain assertion on which the death sentence could be pronounced. Jesus knew this, and yet He answered. But Luke tells us that He first scathingly pointed to the unreality and animus of the question by saying, 'If I tell you, ye

will not believe.' But yet it was fitting that He should solemnly, before the supreme court, representative of the nation, declare that He was the Messiah, and that, if He was to be rejected and condemned, it should be on the ground of that declaration. Before Caiaphas He claimed to be Messiah, before Pilate He claimed to be King. Each rejected Him in the character that appealed to them most. The many-sidedness of the perfect Revealer of God brings Him to each soul in the aspect that most loudly addresses each. Therefore the love in the appeal and the guilt in its rejection are the greater.

But Christ's self-attestation to the council was not limited to the mere claim to the name of Messiah. It disclosed the implications of that name in a way altogether unlike the conceptions held by Caiaphas. When Caiaphas put in apposition 'the Christ' and 'the Son of God,' he was not speaking from the ordinary Jewish point of view, but from some knowledge of Christ's teaching, and there are two charges combined into one.

But Jesus' answer, while plainly claiming to be the Messiah, expands itself in regard to the claim to be 'Son of God,' and shows its tremendous significance. It involves participation in divine authority and omnipotence. It involves a future coming to be the Judge of His judges. It declares that these blind scribes and elders will see Him thus exalted, and it asserts that all this is to begin then and there ('henceforth'), as if that hour of humiliation was to His consciousness the beginning of His manifestation as Lord, or, as John has it, 'the hour that the Son of Man should be glorified.' Nor must we leave out of sight the fact that it is 'the Son of Man' of whom all this

is said, for thereby are indicated the raising of His perfect humanity to participation in Deity, and the possibility that His brethren, too, may sit where He sits. Much was veiled in the answer to the council, much is veiled to us. But this remains,—that Jesus, at that supreme moment, when He was bound to leave no misunderstandings, made the plainest claim to divinity, and could have saved His life if He had not done so. Either Caiaphas, in his ostentatious horror of such impiety, was right in calling Christ's words blasphemy, and not far wrong in inferring that Jesus was not fit to live, or He is the everlasting 'Son of the Father,' and will 'come to be our Judge.'

JESUS CHARGED WITH BLASPHEMY

'Then the high priest rent his clothes, saying, He hath spoken blasphemy; what further need have we of witnesses?'—MATT. xxvi. 65.

JESUS was tried and condemned by two tribunals, the Jewish ecclesiastical and the Roman civil. In each case the charge corresponded to the Court. The Sanhedrin took no cognisance of, and had no concern with, rebellion against Cæsar; though for the time they pretended loyalty. Pilate had still less concern about Jewish superstitions. And so the investigation in each case turned on a different question. In the one it was, 'Art Thou the Son of God?' in the other, 'Art Thou the King of Israel?' The answer to both was a simple 'Yes!' but with very significant differences. Pilate received an explanation; the Sanhedrin none. The Roman governor was taught that Christ's title of King belonged to another region altogether from that of Cæsar, and did not in the slightest degree infringe

upon the dominion that he represented. But 'Son of God' was capable of no explanation that could make it any less offensive; and the only thing to be done was to accept it or to condemn Him.

So this saying of the high priest differs from other words of our Lord's antagonists, which we have been considering in recent pages, in that it is no distortion of our Lord's characteristics or meaning. It correctly understands, but it fatally rejects, His claims; and does not hesitate to take the further step, on the ground of these, of branding Him as a blasphemer.

We may turn the high priest's question in another direction: 'What further need have we of witnesses?' These horror-stricken judges, rending their garments in simulated grief and zeal, and that silent Prisoner, knowing that His life was the forfeit of His claims, yet saying no word of softening or explanation of them, may teach us much. They are witnesses to some of the central facts of the revelation of God in Christ. Let us turn to these for a few moments.

I. First, then, they witness to Christ's claims.

The question that was proposed to Jesus, 'Art Thou the Christ, the Son of the living God?' was suggested by the facts of His ministry, and not by anything that had come out in the course of this investigation. It was the summing up of the impression made on the ecclesiastical authorities of Judaism by His whole attitude and demeanour. And if we look back to His life we shall see that there were instances, long before this, on which, on the same ground, the same charge was flung at Him. For example, when He would heal the paralytic, and, before He dealt with bodily disease, attended to spiritual weakness, and said, 'Thy sins be forgiven thee,' ere He said, 'Take up thy bed and

walk,' there was a group of keen-eyed hunters after heresy sitting eagerly on the watch, who snatched at the words in a moment, and said, 'Who is this that forgiveth sins? No *man* forgiveth sins, but God only! This man speaketh blasphemies!' And they were right. He did claim a divine prerogative; and either the claim must be admitted or the charge of blasphemy urged.

Again, when He infringed Rabbinical Sabbath law by a cure, and they said, 'This Man has broken the Sabbath day,' His vindication was worse than His offence, for He answered, 'My Father worketh hitherto, and I work.' And then they sought the more to kill Him, because He not only brake the Sabbath, but also called God His own Father, making Himself equal with God.' And again, when He declared that the safety of His sheep in His hands was identical with their safety in His Father's hands, and vindicated the audacious parallelism by the tremendous assertion, 'I and My Father are One,' the charge of blasphemy rang out; and was inevitable, unless the claim was true.

These outstanding instances are but, as it were, summits that rise above the general level. But the general level is that of One who takes an altogether unique position. No one else, professing to lead men in paths of righteousness, has so constantly put the stress of His teaching, not upon morality, nor religion, nor obedience to God, but upon this, 'Believe in Me'; or ever pushed forward His own personality into the foreground, and made the whole nobleness and blessedness and security and devoutness of a life to hinge upon that one thing, its personal relation to Him.

People talk about the sweet and gentle wisdom that flowed from Christ's lips, and so on; about the lofty

morality, about the beauty of pity and tenderness, and all the other commonplaces so familiar to us, and we gladly admit them all. But I venture to go a step further than all these, and to say that the outstanding *differentia*, the characteristic which marks off Christ's teaching as something new, peculiar, and altogether *per se*, is not its morality, not its philanthropy, not its meek wisdom, not its sweet reasonableness, but its tremendous assertions of the importance of Himself.

And if I am asked to state the ground upon which such an assertion may be vindicated, I would point you to such facts as these, that this Man took up a position of equality with, and of superiority to, the legislation which He and the people to whom He was speaking regarded as being divinely sent, and said, 'Ye have heard that it hath been said to them of old time' so and so; 'but I say unto you': that this Man declared that to build upon His words was to build upon a rock; that this Man declared that He—He—was the legitimate object of absolute trust, of utter submission and obedience; that He claimed from His followers affiance, love, reverence which cannot be distinguished from worship, and that He did not therein conceive that He was intercepting anything that belonged to the Father. This Man professed to be able to satisfy the desires of every human heart when He said, 'If any man thirst let him come to Me and drink.' This Man claimed to be able to breathe the sanctity of repose in the blessedness of obedience over all the weary and the heavy laden; and assured them that He Himself, through all the ages, and in all lands, and for all troubles, would give them rest. This Man declared that He who stood there, in the quiet homes of Galilee, and went about its

acres with those blessed feet for our advantage, was to be Judge of the whole world. This Man said that His name was 'Son of God'; and this Man declared, 'He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father.'

And then people say to us, 'Oh! your Gospel narratives, even if they be the work of men in good faith, telling what they suppose He said, mistook the Teacher; and if we could strip away the accretion of mistaken reverence, and come to the historical person, we should find no claims like these.'

Well, this is not the time to enter into the large questions which that contention involves, but I point you to the incident which makes my text, and I say, 'What need we any further witnesses?' Nobody denies that Jesus Christ was crucified as the result of a combination of Sanhedrin and Pilate. What set the Jewish rulers against Him with such virulent and murderous determination? Is there anything in the life of Jesus Christ, if it is watered down as the people, who want to knock out all the supernatural, desire to water it down—is there anything in the life that will account for the inveterate acrimony and hostility which pursued Him to the death? The fact remains that, whether or not Evangelists and Apostles misconceived His teaching when they gave such prominence to His personality and His lofty claims, His enemies were under the same delusion, if it were a delusion; and the reason why the whole orthodox religionism of Judaism rejoiced when He was nailed to the Cross was summed up in the taunt which they flung at Him as He hung there, 'If He be the Son of God, let Him come down, and we will believe Him.'

So, brethren, I put into the witness-box Annas and Caiaphas and all their satellites, and I say, 'What need

we any further witnesses?' He died because He declared that He was the Son of God.

And I beseech you ask yourselves whether we are not being put off with a maimed version of His teaching, if there is struck out of it this its central characteristic, that He, 'the sage and humble,' declared that He was 'likewise One with the Creator.'

II. Secondly, note how we have here the witness that Jesus Christ assented always to the loftiest meaning that men attached to His claims.

I have already pointed out the remarkable difference between the explanations which He condescended to give to the Roman governor as to the perfectly innocent meaning of His claim to be the King of Israel, and His silence before the Sanhedrin. That silence is only explicable because they rightly understood the meaning of the claim which they contemptuously and perversely rejected. Jesus Christ knew that His death was the forfeit, as I have said, and yet He locked His lips and said not a word.

In like manner when, on the other occasion to which I have already referred, the Pharisees stumbled at His claims to forgive sins, He said nothing to soften down that claim. If He had meant then only what some people would desire to make Him mean when He said, 'Thy sins be forgiven thee'—viz., that He was simply acting as a minister of the divine forgiveness, and assuring a poor sinner that God had pardoned him—why in common honesty, in discharge of His plain obligations of a teacher, did He not say so—not for His own sake, but for the sake of preventing such a tremendous misunderstanding of His meaning? But He let them go away with the conviction that He intended to claim a divine prerogative, and vindicated the

assertion by doing what only a divine power could do: 'That ye may know that the Son of Man hath power enough on earth to forgive sins, He saith unto the sick of the palsy, Take up thy bed and walk.' There was no need for Him to have wrought a miracle to establish His right to tell a poor soul that God forgave sin. And the fact that the miracle was supposed to be the demonstration and the vindication of His right to declare forgiveness shows that He was exercising that prerogative which belongs, as they rightly said, to God only.

And in precisely the same manner, the commonest obligations of honesty, the plain duty of a misunderstood Teacher, to say nothing of the duty of self-preservation, ought to have opened His lips in the presence of the Jewish authorities, if they understood wrongly and set too high their estimate of the meaning of His claims. His silence establishes the fact that they understood these aright.

And so, all through His life, we note this peculiarity, that He never puts aside as too lofty for truth men's highest interpretations of His claims, nor as too lowly for their mutual relation the lowest reverence which bowed before Him. Peter, in the house of Cornelius, said, 'Stand up! for I myself also am a man.' Paul and Barnabas, when the priests brought out the oxen and garlands to the gates of Lystra, could say, 'We also are men of like passions with yourselves.' But this meek Jesus lets men fall at His feet; and women wash them with their tears and wipe them with the hairs of their head; and souls stretch out maimed hands of faith, and grasp Him as their only hope. When His apostle said, 'Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God,' His answer was, 'Blessed art thou,

. . . for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee,' and when another exclaimed, 'My Lord and my God!' this Pattern of all meekness accepted and endorsed the title, and pronounced a benediction on all who, not having seen Him, should hereafter attain a like faith.

Now I want to know whether that characteristic, which runs through all His life, and is inseparable from it, can be vindicated on any ground except the ground that He was 'God manifest in the flesh.' Either Jesus Christ had a greedy appetite for excessive adoration, was a victim to diseased vanity and ever-present self-regard—the most damning charge that you can bring against a religious teacher—or He accepted love and reverence and trust, because the love and the reverence and the trust knit souls to the Incarnate God their Saviour.

III. And so, lastly, we have here witness to the only alternative to the acceptance of His claims.

He hath spoken 'blasphemy,' not because He had derogated from the dignity of divinity, but because He had presumed to participate in it. And it seems to me, with all deference, that this rough alternative is the only legitimate one. If Jesus Christ did make such claims, and His relation to the Jewish hierarchy and His death are, as I have shown you, apart even from the testimony of the Evangelists, strong confirmation of the fact that He did—if Jesus Christ did make such claims, and they were not valid, one of two things follows. Either He believed them, and then, what about His sanity? or He did not believe them, and then, what about His honesty? In either case, what about His claims to be a Teacher of religion? What about His claims to be the Pattern of humanity? That part

of His teaching and character is either the manifestation of His glory or it is like one of those fatal black seams that run through and penetrate into the substance of a fair white marble statue, marring all the rest of its pale and celestial beauty. Brethren, it seems to me that, when all is said and done, we come to one of three things about Jesus Christ. Either 'He blasphemeth' if He said these things, and they were not true, or 'He is beside Himself' if He said these things and believed them, or

'Thou art the King of Glory, O Christ ;
Thou art the everlasting Son of the Father.'

Now I know that there are many men who, I venture to say, are far better than their creed, and who, believing it impossible to accept, in their plain meaning, the plain claims of Jesus Christ to divinity, do yet cleave to Him with a love and a reverence and an obedience which more orthodox men might well copy. And far be it from me to say one word which might seem even to quench the faintest beam of light that, shining from His perfect character, draws any heart, however imperfectly, to Himself. Only, if I speak to any such at this time, I beseech them to follow the light which draws them, and to see whether their reverence for that fair character should not lead them to accept implicitly the claims that came from His own lips. I humbly venture to say that if we know anything at all about Jesus Christ, we know that He lived declaring Himself to be the Everlasting Son of the Father, and that He died because He did so declare Himself. And I beseech you to ponder the question whether reverence for Him and admiration of His character can be logically and reasonably retained,

side by side with the repudiation of that which is the most distinctive part of His message to men.

Oh, brethren, if it is true that God has come in the flesh, and that that sweet, gracious, infinitely beautiful life is really the revelation of the heart of God, then what a beam of sunshine falls upon all the darkness of this world! Then God is love; then that love holds us all; did not shrink from dying for us, and lives for ever to bless us. If these claims are true, what should our attitude be but that of infinite trust, love, submission, obedience, and the shaping of our lives after the pattern of His life?

These rejectors, when they said, 'He speaketh blasphemies,' were sealing their own doom, and the ruined Temple and nineteen centuries of wandering misery show what comes to men who hear Christ declaring that He is the Son of the living God and the Judge of the world, and who find nothing in the words but blasphemy. On the other hand, if we will answer His question, 'Whom say ye that I am?' as the apostle answered it, we shall, like the apostle, receive a benediction from His lips, and be set on that faith as on a rock against which the 'gates of hell' shall not prevail.

'SEE THOU TO THAT!'

'I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood. And they said, What is that to us? See thou to that. 24. I am innocent of the blood of this just Person: see ye to it.'—MATT. xxvii. 4, 24.

So, what the priests said to Judas, Pilate said to the priests. They contemptuously bade their wretched instrument bear the burden of his own treachery. They had condescended to use his services, but he pre-

sumed too far if he thought that that gave him a claim upon their sympathies. The tools of more respectable and bolder sinners are flung aside as soon as they are done with. What were the agonies or the tears of a hundred such as he to these high-placed and heartless transgressors? Priests though they were, and therefore bound by their office to help any poor creature that was struggling with a wounded conscience, they had nothing better to say to him than this scornful gibe, 'What is that to us? See thou to that.'

Pilate, on the other hand, metes to them the measure which they had meted to Judas. With curious verbal correspondence, he repeats the very words of Judas and of the priests. 'Innocent blood,' said Judas. 'I am innocent of the blood of this just Person,' said Pilate. 'See thou to that,' answered they. 'See ye to it,' says he. He tries to shove off his responsibility upon them, and they are quite willing to take it. Their consciences are not easily touched. Fanatical hatred which thinks itself influenced by religious motives is the blindest and cruellest of all passions, knowing no compunction, and utterly unperceptive of the innocence of its victim.

And so these three, Judas, the priests, and Pilate, suggest to us, I think, a threefold way in which conscience is perverted. Judas represents the agony of conscience, Pilate represents the shuffling sophistications of a half-awakened conscience, and those priests and people represent the torpor of an altogether misdirected conscience.

I. Judas, or the agony of conscience.

'I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood.' We do not need to enter at any length upon the difficult question as to what were the motives of

Judas in his treachery. For my part I do not see that there is anything in the Scripture narrative, simply interpreted, to bear out the hypothesis that his motives were mistaken zeal and affection for Christ; and a desire to force Him to the avowal of His Messiahship. One can scarcely suppose zeal so strangely perverted as to begin by betrayal, and if the object was to make our Lord speak out His claims, the means adopted were singularly ill-chosen. The story, as it stands, naturally suggests a much less far-fetched explanation.

Judas was simply a man of a low earthly nature, who became a follower of Christ, thinking that He was to prove a Messiah of the vulgar type, or another Judas Maccabæus. He was not attracted by Christ's character and teaching. As the true nature of Christ's work and kingdom became more obvious, he became more weary of Him and it. The closest proximity to Jesus Christ made eleven enthusiastic disciples, but it made one traitor. No man could live near Him for three years without coming to hate Him if he did not love Him. Then, as ever, He was set for the fall and for the rise of many. He was the 'savour of life unto life, or of death unto death.'

But be this as it may, we have here to do with the sudden revulsion of feeling which followed upon the accomplished act. This burst of confession does not sound like the words of a man who had been actuated by motives of mistaken affection. He knows himself a traitor, and that fair, perfect character rises before him in its purity, as he had never seen it before—to rebuke and confound him.

So this exclamation of his puts into a vivid shape, which may help it to stick in our memories and hearts,

this thought—what an awful difference there is in the look of a sin before we do it and afterwards! Before we do it the thing to be gained seems so attractive, and the transgression that gains it seems so comparatively insignificant. Yes! and when we have done it the two change places; the thing that we win by it seems so contemptible—thirty pieces of silver! pitch them over the Temple enclosure and get rid of them!—and the thing that we did to win them dilates into such awful magnitude!

For instance, suppose we do anything that we know to be wrong, being tempted to it by a momentary indulgence of some mere animal impulse. By the very nature of the case, that dies in its satisfaction and the desire dies along with it. We do not wish the prize any more when once we have got it. It lasts but a moment and is past. Then we are left alone with the thought of the sin that we have done. When we get the prize of our wrong-doing, we find out that it is not as all-satisfying as we expected it would be. Most of our earthly aims are like that. The chase is a great deal more than the hare. Or, as George Herbert has it, ‘Nothing between two dishes—a splendid service of silver plate, and when you take the cover off there is no food to eat—such are the pleasures here.’

Universally, this is true, that sooner or later, when the delirium of passion and the rush of temptation are over and we wake to consciousness, we find that we are none the richer for the thing gained, and oh! so infinitely the poorer for the means by which we gained it. It is that old story of the Veiled Prophet that wooed and won the hearts of foolish maidens, and, when he had them in his power in the inner chamber, removed the silver veil which they had thought hid

dazzling glory and showed hideous features that struck despair into their hearts. Every man's sin does that for him. And to you I come now with this message: every wrong thing that you do, great or small, will be like some of those hollow images of the gods that one hears of in barbarian temples—looked at in front, fair, but when you get behind them you find a hollow, full of dust and spiders' webs and unclean things. Be sure of this, every sin is a blunder.

That is the first lesson that lies in these words of this wretched traitor; but again, here is an awful picture for us of the hell upon earth, of a conscience which has no hope of pardon. I do not suppose that Judas was lost, if he were lost, because he betrayed Jesus Christ, but because, having betrayed Jesus Christ, he never asked to be forgiven. And I suppose that the difference between the traitor who betrayed Him and the other traitor who denied Him, was this, that the one, when 'he went out and wept bitterly,' had the thought of a loving Master with him, and the other, when 'he went out and hanged himself,' had the thought of nothing but that foul deed glaring before him. I pray you to learn this lesson—you cannot think too much, too blackly, of your own sins, but you may think too exclusively of them, and if you do they will drive you to madness of despair.

My dear friend, there is no penitence or remorse which is deep enough for the smallest transgression; but there is no transgression which is so great but that forgiveness for it may come. And we may have it for the asking, if we will go to that dear Christ that died for us. The consciousness of sinfulness is a wholesome consciousness. I would that every man and woman listening to me now had it deep in their consciences,

and then I would that it might lead us all to that one Lord in whom there is forgiveness and peace. Be sure of this, that if Judas Iscariot, when his 'soul flared forth in the dark,' died without hope and without pardon, it was not because his crime was too great for forgiveness, but because the forgiveness had never been asked. There is no unpardonable sin except that of refusing the pardon that avails for all sin.

II. So much, then, for this first picture and the lessons that come out of it. In the next place we take Pilate, as the representative of what I have ventured to call the shufflings of a half-awakened conscience.

'I am innocent of the blood of this just Person,' says he: 'see ye to it.' He is very willing to shuffle off his responsibility upon priests and people, and they, for their part, are quite as willing to accept it; but the responsibility can neither be shuffled off by him nor accepted by them. His motive in surrendering Jesus to them was probably nothing more than the low and cowardly wish to humour his turbulent subjects, and so to secure an easy tenure of office. For such an end what did one poor man's life matter? He had a great contempt for the accusers, which he is scarcely at the pains to conceal. It breaks out in half-veiled sarcasms, by which he cynically indemnifies himself for his ignoble yielding to the constraint which they put upon him. He knows perfectly well that the Roman power has nothing to fear from this King, whose kingdom rested on His witness to the Truth. He knows perfectly well that unavowed motives of personal enmity lie at the bottom of the whole business. In the words of our text he acquits Christ, and thereby condemns himself. If Pilate knew that Jesus was innocent, he knew that he, as governor, was guilty of prostituting Roman

justice, which was Rome's best gift to her subject nations, and of giving up an innocent man to death, in order to save himself trouble and to conciliate a howling mob. No washing of his hands will cleanse them. 'All the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten' that hand. But his words let us see how a man may sophisticate his conscience and quibble about his guilt.

Here, then, we get once more a vivid picture that may remind us of what, alas! we all know in our own experience, how a man's conscience may be clear-sighted enough to discern, and vocal enough to declare, that a certain thing is wrong, but not strong enough to restrain from doing it. Conscience has a voice and an eye; alas! it has no hands. It shares the weakness of all law, it cannot get itself executed. Men will get over a fence, although the board that says, 'Trespassers will be prosecuted' is staring them in the face in capital letters at the very place where they leap it. Your conscience is a king without an army, a judge without officers. 'If it had authority, as it has the power, it would govern the world,' but as things are, it is reduced to issuing vain edicts and to saying, 'Thou shalt not,' and if you turn round and say, 'I will, though,' then conscience has no more that it can do.

And then here, too, is an illustration of one of the commonest of the ways by which we try to slip our necks out of the collar, and to get rid of the responsibilities that really belong to us. 'See ye to it' does not avail to put Pilate's crime on the priests' shoulders. Men take part in evil, and each thinks himself innocent, because he has companions. Half-a-dozen men carry a burden together; none of them fancies that he is carrying it. It is like the case of turning out a

platoon of soldiers to shoot a mutineer—nobody knows whose bullet killed him, and nobody feels himself guilty; but there the man lies dead, and it was somebody that did it. So corporations, churches, societies, and nations do things that individuals would not do, and each man of them wipes his mouth and says, 'I have done no harm.' And even when we sin alone we are clever at finding scapegoats. 'The woman tempted me, and I did eat,' is the formula universally used yet. The schoolboy's excuse, 'Please, sir, it was not me, it was the other boy,' is what we are all ready to say.

Now I pray you, brethren, to remember that, whether our consciences try to shuffle off responsibility for united action upon the other members of the firm, or whether we try to excuse our individual actions by laying blame on our tempers, or whether we adopt the modern slang, and talk about circumstances and heredity and the like, as being reasons for the diminution or the extinction of the notion of guilt, it is sophistical trifling; and down at the bottom most of us know that we alone are responsible for the volition which leads to our act. We could have helped it if we had liked. Nobody compelled us to keep in the partnership of evil, or to yield to the tempter. Pilate was not forced by his subjects to give the commandment that 'it should be as they required.' They had their own burden to carry. Each man has to bear the consequences of his actions. There are many 'burdens' which we can 'bear for one another, and so fulfil the law of Christ'; but every man has to bear as his own the burden of the fruits of his deeds. In that harvest, he that soweth and he that reapeth are one, and each of

us has to drink as we ourselves have brewed. You have to pay for your share, however many companions you may have had in the act.

So do not you sophisticate your consciences with the delusion that your responsibility may be shifted to any other person or thing. These may diminish, or may modify your responsibility, and God takes all these into account. But after all these have been taken into account there is this left—that you yourselves have done the act, which you need not have done unless you had so willed, and that having done it, you have to carry it on your back for evermore. 'See thou to that,' was a heartless word, but it was a true one. 'Every one of us shall give an account of himself to God,' and as the old Book of Proverbs has it, 'If thou be wise, thou shalt be wise for thyself: and if thou scornest, thou alone shalt bear it.'

III. And so, lastly, we have here another group still—the priests and people. They represent for us the torpor and misdirection of conscience.

'Then answered all the people and said, His blood be on us and on our children.' They were perfectly ready to take the burden upon themselves. They thought that they were 'doing God service' when they slew God's Messenger. They had no perception of the beauty and gentleness of Christ's character. They believed Him to be a blasphemer, and they believed it to be a solemn religious duty to slay Him then and there. Were they to blame because they slew a blasphemer? According to Jewish law—no. They were to blame because they had brought themselves into such a moral condition that that was all which they thought of and saw in Jesus Christ. With their awful words they stand before us, as perhaps the crowning instances

in Scripture history of the possible torpor which may paralyse consciences.

I need not dwell, I suppose, even for a moment, upon the thought of how the highest and noblest sentiments may be perverted into becoming the allies of the lowest crime. 'O Liberty! what crimes have been done in thy name!' you remember one of the victims of the guillotine said, as her last words. 'O Religion! what crimes have been done in *thy* name!' is one of the lessons to be gathered from Calvary.

But, passing that, to come to the thing that is of more consequence to each of us, let us take this thought, dear brethren, as to the awful possibility of a conscience going fast asleep in the midst of the wildest storm of passion, like that unfaithful prophet Jonah, down in the hold of the heathen ship. You can lull your consciences into dead slumber. You can stifle them so that they shall not speak a word against the worst of your sins. You can do so by simply neglecting them, by habitually refusing to listen to them. If you keep picking all the leaves and buds off the tree before they open, it will stop flowering. You can do it by gathering round yourself always, and only, evil associations and evil deeds. The habit of sinning will lull a conscience faster than almost anything else. We do not know how hot a room is, or how much the air is exhausted, when we have been sitting in it for an hour and a half. But if we came into it from outside we should feel the difference. Styrian peasants thrive and fatten upon arsenic, and men may flourish upon all iniquity and evil, and conscience will say never a word. Take care of that delicate balance within you, and see that you do not tamper with it nor twist it.

Conscience may be misguided as well as lulled. It

may call evil good, and good evil; it may take honey for gall, and gall for honey. And so we need something outside of ourselves to be our guide, our standard. We are not to be contented that our consciences acquit us. 'I know nothing against myself, yet I am not hereby justified,' says the apostle; 'he that judgeth me is the Lord.' And it is quite possible that a man may have no prick of conscience and yet have done a very wrong thing. So we want, as it seems to me, something outside of ourselves that shall not be affected by our variations. Conscience is like the light on the binnacle of a ship. It tosses up and down along with the vessel. We want a steady light yonder on that headland, on the fixed solid earth, which shall not heave with the heaving wave, nor vary at all. Conscience speaks lowest when it ought to speak loudest. The worst man is least troubled by his conscience. It is like a lamp that goes out in the thickest darkness. Therefore we need, as I believe, a revelation of truth and goodness and beauty outside of ourselves to which we may bring our consciences that they may be enlightened and set right. We want a standard like the authorised weights and measures that are kept in the Tower of London, to which all the people in the little country villages may send up their yard measures and their pound weights, and find out if they are just and true. We want a *Bible*, and we want a *Christ* to tell us what is duty, as well as to make it possible for us to do it.

These groups which we have been looking at now, show us how very little help and sympathy a wounded conscience can get from its fellows. The conspirators turn upon each other as soon as the detectives are amongst them, and there is always one of them ready

to go into the witness-box and swear away the lives of the others to save his own neck. Wolves tear sick wolves to pieces.

Round us there stand Society, pitiless and stern, and Nature, rigid and implacable; not to be besought, not to be turned. And when I, in the midst of this universe of fixed law and cause and consequence, wail out, 'I have sinned,' a thousand voices say to me, 'What is that to us? See thou to that.' And so I am left with my guilt—it and I together. There comes One with outstretched, wounded hands, and says, 'Cast all thy burden upon Me, and I will free thee from it all.' 'Surely He hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows!' Trust in Him, in His great sacrifice, and you will find that His 'innocent blood' has a power that will liberate your conscience from its torpor, its vain excuses, its agony and despair.

THE SENTENCE WHICH CONDEMNED THE JUDGES

And Jesus stood before the governor: and the governor asked Him, saying, Art Thou the King of the Jews? And Jesus said unto him, Thou sayest. 12. And when He was accused of the chief priests and elders, He answered nothing. 13. Then said Pilate unto Him, Hearest Thou not how many things they witness against Thee? 14. And He answered him to never a word; inasmuch that the governor marvelled greatly. 15. Now at that feast the governor was wont to release unto the people a prisoner, whom they would. 16. And they had then a notable prisoner, called Barabbas. 17. Therefore when they were gathered together, Pilate said unto them, Whom will ye that I release unto you? Barabbas, or Jesus which is called Christ? 18. For he knew that for envy they had delivered Him. 19. When he was set down on the judgment seat, his wife sent unto him, saying, Have thou nothing to do with that just man: for I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of Him. 20. But the chief priests and elders persuaded the multitude that they should ask Barabbas, and destroy Jesus. 21. The governor answered and said unto them, Whether of the twain will ye that I release unto you? They said, Barabbas. 22. Pilate saith unto them, What shall I do then with Jesus which is called Christ? They all say unto him, Let Him be crucified. 23. And the governor said, Why, what evil hath He done? But they cried out the more, saying, Let him be crucified. 24. When Pilate saw that he could prevail nothing, but that rather a tumult was made, he took water, and

washed his hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just Person: see ye to it. 25. Then answered all the people, and said, His blood be on us, and on our children. 26. Then released he Barabbas unto them: and when he had scourged Jesus, he delivered Him to be crucified.'—ST. MATT. xxvii. 11-26.

THE principal figures in this passage are Pilate and the Jewish rulers and people. Jesus is all but passive. They are busy in condemning Him, and little know that they are condemning themselves. They are unconsciously exemplifying the tragic truth of Christ's saying, 'Whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken.' They do not dislodge it, but their attempt to dislodge it wounds them.

I. Matthew gives a very summary account of our Lord's appearing before Pilate, but, brief as it is, and much as it omits, it throws up into strong light the two essential points,—Christ's declaration that He was the King of the Jews, and His silence while a storm of accusations raged around Him. As to the former, it was the only charge with which Pilate was properly concerned. He had a right to know whether this strange criminal was dangerous to Rome, because He claimed kingship, and, if he were satisfied that He was not, his bounden duty was to liberate Him. One can understand the scornful emphasis which Pilate laid on 'Thou' as he looked on his Prisoner, who certainly would not seem to his practical eyes a very formidable leader of revolt. There is a world of contempt, amused rather than alarmed, in the question, and behind it lies the consciousness of commanding legions enough to crush any rising headed by such a person. John's account shows the pains which Jesus took to make sure of the sense in which the question was asked before He answered it, and then to make clear that His kingship bore no menace to Rome. That being made plain, He answered with an affirmative. Just as

He had in unmistakable language claimed before the Sanhedrin to be the Messiah, the Son of God, so He claimed before Pilate to be the King of Israel, answering each tribunal as to what each had the right to inquire into, and thus 'before Pontius Pilate witnessing the good confession,' and leaving both tribunals without excuse. Jesus died because He would not bate His claims to Messianic dignity. Did He fling away His life for a false conception of Himself? He was either a dreamer intoxicated with an illusion, and His death was suicide, or He was—what?

The one avowal was all that Pilate was entitled to. For the rest Jesus locked His lips, and He whose very name was The Word was silent. What was the meaning of that silence? It was not disdain, nor unwillingness to make Himself known; but it was partly merciful—inasmuch as He knew that all speech would have been futile, and would but have added to the condemnation of such hearers as Caiaphas, Herod, and Pilate—and partly judicial. Still more was it the silence of perfect, unresisting submission,—'as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so He openeth not His mouth.' And it is a pattern for us, as Peter tells us in his Epistle; for it is with regard to this very matter of taking unjust suffering patiently and without resistance that the apostle says that Jesus has 'left us an example.' There are limits to such silent endurance of wrong, for Paul defended himself tooth and nail before priests and kings; but Christ's followers are strongest by meek patience, and descend when they take a leaf out of their enemies' book.

II. The next point is Pilate's weak attempt to save Jesus. Christ's silence had impressed Pilate, and, if he had been a true man, he would not have stopped at

‘marvelling greatly.’ He was clearly convinced of Christ’s innocence of any crime that threatened Roman supremacy, and therefore was bound to have given effect to his convictions, and let Jesus go. He had read the motives of the priests, which were too plain for a shrewd man of the world to be blind to them. That Jews should be taken with such a sudden fit of loyalty as to yell for the death of a fellow-countryman because he was a rebel against Cæsar was too absurd to swallow, and Pilate was not taken in. He knew that something else was working below ground, and hit on ‘envy’ as the solution. He was not far wrong; for the zeal which to the priests themselves seemed to be excited by devout regard for God’s honour was really kindled by determination to keep their own prerogatives, and keen insight into the curtailment of these which would follow if this Jesus were recognised as Messiah. Pilate’s diagnosis coincided with Christ’s in the parable: ‘This is the Heir; come, let us kill Him, and the inheritance shall be ours.’

So, willing to deliver Jesus, and yet afraid to cross the wishes of his ticklish subjects, Pilate, like other weak men, tries a trick by which he may get his way and seem to give them theirs. He hoped that they would choose Jesus rather than Barabbas as the object of the customary release. It was ingenious of him to narrow the choice to one or other of the two, ignoring all other prisoners who might have had the benefit of the custom. But there is also, perhaps, a dash of sarcasm, and a hint of his having penetrated the priests’ motives, in his confining their choice to Jesus or Barabbas; for Barabbas was what they had charged Jesus with being,—a rebel; and, if they preferred

him to Jesus, the hypocrisy of their suspicious loyalty would be patent. The same sub-acid tone is obvious in Pilate's twice designating our Lord as 'Jesus which is called Christ.' He delights to mortify them by pushing the title into their faces, as it were. He dare not be just, and he relieves and revenges himself by being cynical and mocking.

III. Having referred the choice to the 'multitude,' Pilate takes his place on his official seat to wait for, and then to ratify, their vote. In that pause, he perhaps felt some compunction at paltering with justice, which it was Rome's one virtue to administer. How his wife's message would increase his doubt! Was her dream a divine warning, or a mere reflection in sleep of waking thoughts? It is noticeable that Matthew records several dreams which conveyed God's will,—for example, to Joseph and to the Magi, and here may be another instance; or some tidings as to Jesus may have reached the lady, though not her husband, and her womanly sense of right may have shaped the dream, and given her vivid impressions of the danger of abetting a judicial murder. But Matthew seems to tell of her intervention mainly in order to preserve her testimony to Jesus' innocence, and to point out one more of the fences which Pilate trampled down in his dread of offending the rulers. A wife's message, conveying what both he and she probably regarded as a supernatural warning, was powerless to keep him back from his disgraceful failure of duty.

IV. While he was fighting against the impression of that message, the rulers were busy in the crowd, suggesting the choice of Barabbas. It was perhaps his wife's words that stung him to act at once, and have done with his inner conflict. So he calls for the decision of

the alternative which he had already submitted. His dignity would suffer, if he had to wait longer for an answer. He got it at once, and the unanimous vote was for Barabbas. Probably the rulers had skilfully manipulated the people. The multitude is easily led by demagogues, but, left to itself, its instincts are usually right, though its perception of character is often mistaken. Why was Barabbas preferred? Probably just because he had been cast into prison for sedition, and so was thought to be a good patriot. Popular heroes often win their reputation by very questionable acts, and Barabbas was forgiven his being a murderer for the sake of his being a rebel. But it was not so much that Barabbas was loved as that Jesus was hated, and it was not the multitude so much as the rulers that hated him. Many of those now shrieking 'Crucify Him!' had shouted 'Hosanna!' a day or two before till they were hoarse. The populace was guilty of fickleness, blindness, rashness, too easy credence of the crafty calumnies of the rulers. But a far deeper stain rests on these rulers who had resisted the light, and were now animated by the basest self-interest in the garb of keen regard for the honour of God. There were very different degrees of guilt in the many voices that roared 'Barabbas!'

Pilate made one more feeble attempt to save Jesus by asking what was to be done with Him. The question was an ignoble abdication of his judicial office, and perhaps was meant as a salve for his own conscience, and an excuse to his wife, enabling him to say, 'I did not crucify Him; they did,'—a miserable pretext, the last resort of a weak man, who knew that he was doing a wrong and cowardly thing.

V. The same nervous fear and vain attempt to

shuffle responsibility off himself give tragic interest to his theatrical washing of his hands. The one thing that he feared was a riot, which would be like a spark in a barrel of gunpowder, if it broke out at the Passover, when Jerusalem swarmed with excited crowds. To avoid that, the sacrifice of one Jew's life was a small matter, even though he was an interesting and remarkable person, and Pilate knew Him to be perfectly harmless.

But no washing of hands could shift the guilt from Pilate.

'Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood
Clean from my hand? No.'

His vain declaration of innocence is an acknowledgment of guilt, for he is forced by conscience to declare that Jesus is a 'righteous Man,' and, as such, He should have been under the broad shield of Roman justice. We too often deceive ourselves by throwing the blame of our sins on companions or circumstances, and try to cheat our consciences into silence. But our guilt is ours, however many allies we have had, and however strong have been our temptations; and though we may say, 'I am innocent,' God will sooner or later say to each of us, 'Thou art the man!'

The wild cry of passion with which the multitude accepted the responsibility has been only too completely fulfilled in the millennium-long Iliad of woes which has attended the Jews. Surely, the existence, in such circumstances, for all these centuries, of that strange, weird, fated race, is a standing miracle, and the most conspicuous proof that 'verily, there is a God that judgeth in the earth.' But it is also a prophecy that Israel shall 'turn to the Lord,' and that the blood

which has so long been on them as a crime, carrying its own punishment, will at last be sprinkled on their hearts, and take away their sin.

THE CRUCIFIXION

'And when they were come unto a place called Golgotha, that is to say, a place of a skull, 34. They gave Him vinegar to drink mingled with gall: and when He had tasted thereof, He would not drink. 35. And they crucified Him, and parted His garments, casting lots: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet. They parted My garments among them, and upon My vesture did they cast lots. 36. And sitting down they watched Him there; 37. And set up over His head His accusation written, THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS. 38. Then were there two thieves crucified with Him, one on the right hand, and another on the left. 39. And they that passed by reviled Him, wagging their heads, 40. And saying, Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, save Thyself. If Thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross. 41. Likewise also the chief priests mocking Him, with the scribes and elders, said, 42. He saved others; Himself He cannot save. If He be the King of Israel, let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe Him. 43. He trusted in God; let Him deliver Him now, if He will have Him: for He said, I am the Son of God. 44. The thieves also, which were crucified with Him, cast the same in His teeth. 45. Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land unto the ninth hour. 46. And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me? 47. Some of them that stood there, when they heard that, said, This Man calleth for Elias. 48. And straightway one of them ran, and took a sponge, and filled it with vinegar, and put it on a reed, and gave Him to drink. 49. The rest said, Let be, let us see whether Elias will come to save Him. 50. Jesus, when He had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost.'—MATT. xxvii. 33-50.

THE characteristic of Matthew's account of the crucifixion is its representation of Jesus as perfectly passive and silent. His refusal of the drugged wine, His cry of desolation, and His other cry at death, are all His recorded acts. The impression of the whole is 'as a sheep before his shearers is dumb, so He openeth not His mouth.' We are bid to look on the grim details of the infliction of the terrible death, and to listen to the mockeries of people and priests; but reverent awe forbids description of Him who hung there in His long, silent agony. Would that like reticence had checked

the ill-timed eloquence of preachers and teachers of later days!

I. We have the ghastly details of the crucifixion.—Conder's suggestion of the site of Calvary as a little knoll outside the city, seems possible. It is now a low, bare hillock, with a scanty skin of vegetation over the rock, and in its rounded shape and bony rockiness explains why it was called 'skull.' It stands close to the main Damascus road, so that there would be many 'passers by' on that feast day. Its top commands a view over the walls into the temple enclosure, where, at the very hour of the death of Jesus, the Passover lamb was perhaps being slain. Arrived at the place, the executioners go about their task with stolid precision. What was the crucifying of another Jew or two to them? Before they lift the cross or fasten their prisoner to it, a little touch of pity, or perhaps only the observance of the usual custom, leads them to offer a draught of wine, in which some anodyne had been mixed, to deaden agony. But the cup which He had to drink needed that He should be in full possession of all His sensibilities to pain, and of all His unclouded firmness of resolve; and so His patient lips closed against the offered mercy. He would not drink because He would suffer, and He would suffer because He would redeem. His last act before He was nailed to the cross was an act of voluntary refusal of an opened door of escape from some portion of His pains.

What a gap there is between verses 34 and 35! The unconcerned soldiers went on to the next step in their ordinary routine on such an occasion,—the fixing of the cross and fastening of the victim to it. To them it was only what they had often done before; to Matthew, it was too sacred to be narrated, He cannot bring his

pen to write it. As it were, he bids us turn away our eyes for a moment; and when next we look, the deed is done, and there stands the cross, and the Lord hanging, dumb and unresisting, on it. We see not Him, but the soldiers, busy at their next task. So little were they touched by compassion or awe, that they paid no heed to Him, and suspended their work to make sure of their perquisites,—the poor robes which they stripped from His body. Thus gently Matthew hints at the ignominy of exposure attendant on crucifixion, and gives the measure of the hard stolidity of the guards. Gain had been their first thought, comfort was their second. They were a little tired with their march and their work, and they had to stop there on guard for an indefinite time, with nothing to do but two more prisoners to crucify: so they take a rest, and idly keep watch over Him till He shall die. How possible it is to look at Christ's sufferings and see nothing! These rude legionaries gazed for hours on what has touched the world ever since, and what angels desired to look into, and saw nothing but a dying Jew. They thought about the worth of the clothes, or about how long they would have to stay there, and in the presence of the most stupendous fact in the world's history were all unmoved. We too may gaze on the cross and see nothing. We too may look at it without emotion, because without faith, or any consciousness of what it may mean for us. Only they who see there the sacrifice for their sins and the world's, see what is there. Others are as blind as, and less excusable than, these soldiers who watched all day by the Cross, seeing nothing, and tramped back at night to their barrack utterly ignorant of what they had been doing. But their work was not quite done. There was still a piece of grim mockery to

be performed, which they would much enjoy. The 'cause,' as Matthew calls it, had to be nailed to the upper part of the cross. It was tri-lingual, as John tells us,—in Hebrew, the language of revelation; in Greek, the tongue of philosophy and art; in Latin, the speech of law and power. The three chief forces of the human spirit gave unconscious witness to the King; the three chief languages of the western world proclaimed His universal monarchy, even while they seemed to limit it to one nation. It was meant as a gibe at Him and at the nation, and as Pilate's statement of the reason for his sentence; but it meant more than Pilate meant by it, and it was fitting that His royal title should hang above His head; for the cross is His throne, and He is the King of men because He has died for them all. One more piece of work the soldiers had still to do. The crucifixion of the two robbers (perhaps of Barabbas' gang, though less fortunate than he) by Christ's side was intended to associate Him in the public mind with them and their crimes, and was the last stroke of malice, as if saying, 'Here is your King, and here are two of His subjects and ministers.' Matthew says nothing of the triumph of Christ's love, which won the poor robber for a disciple even at that hour of ignominy. His one purpose seems to be to accumulate the tokens of suffering and shame, and so to emphasise the silent endurance of the meek Lamb of God. Therefore, without a word about any of our Lord's acts or utterances, he passes on to the next group of incidents.

II. The mockeries of people and priests. There would be many coming and going on the adjoining road, most of them too busy about their own affairs to delay long; for crucifixion was a slow process, and,

when once the cross has been lifted, there would be little to see. But they were not too busy to spit venom at Him as they passed. How many of these scoffers, to whom death cast no shield round the object of their poor taunts, had shouted themselves hoarse on the Monday, and waved palm branches that were not withered yet! What had made the change? There was no change. They were running with the stream in both their hosannas and their jeers, and the one were worth as much as the other. They had been tutored to cry, 'Blessed is He that cometh!' and now they were tutored to repeat what had been said at the trial about destroying the temple. The worshippers of success are true to themselves when they mock at failure. They who shout round Jesus, when other people are doing it, are only consistent when they join in the roar of execration. Let us take care that our worship of Him is rooted in our own personal experience, and independent of what rulers or influential minds may say of Him.

A common passion levels all distinctions of culture and rank. The reverend dignitaries echoed the ferocious ridicule of the mob, whom they despised so much. The poorest criminal would have been left to die in peace; but brutal laughter surged round the silent sufferer, and showers of barbed sarcasms were flung at Him. The throwers fancied them exquisite jests, and demonstrations of the absurdity of Christ's claims; but they were really witnesses to His claims, and explanations of His sufferings. Look at them in turn, with this thought in our minds. 'He saved others; Himself He cannot save,' was launched as a sarcasm which confuted His alleged miracles by His present helplessness. How much it admits, even while it denies! Then, He did work miracles; and they were all for others, never

for His own ends; and they were all for saving, never for destroying. Then, too, by this very taunt His claim to be the 'Saviour' is presupposed. And so, 'Physician, heal Thyself,' seemed to them an unanswerable missile to fling. If they had only known what made the 'cannot,' and seen that it was a 'will not,' they would have stood full in front of the great miracle of love which was before them unsuspected, and would have learned that the not saving Himself, which they thought blew to atoms His pretensions to save others, was really the condition of His saving a world. If He is to save others He cannot save Himself. That is the law for all mutual help. The lamp burns out in giving light, but the necessity for the death of Him who is the life of the world is founded on a deeper 'must.' His only way of delivering us from the burden of sin is His taking it on Himself. He has to 'bear our griefs and carry our sorrows,' if He is to bear away the sin of the world. But the 'cannot' derives all its power from His own loving will. The rulers' taunt was a venomous lie, as they meant it. If for 'cannot' we read 'will not,' it is the central truth of the Gospel.

Nor did they succeed better with their second gibe, which made mirth of such a throne, and promised allegiance if He would come down. O blind leaders of the blind! That death which seemed to them to shatter His royalty really established it. His Cross is His throne of saving power, by which He sways hearts and wills, and because of it He receives from the Father universal dominion, and every knee shall bow to Him. It is just because He did not come down from it that we believe on Him. On His head are many crowns; but, however many they be, they all grow out of the crown of thorns. The true kingship is absolute com-

mand over willingly submitted spirits; and it is His death which bows us before Him in raptures of glad love which counts submission, liberty, and sacrifice blessed. He has the right to command because He has given Himself for us, and His death wakes all-surrendering and all-expecting faith.

Nor was the third taunt more fortunate. These very religious men had read their Bibles so badly that they might never have heard of Job, nor of the latter half of Isaiah. They had been poring over the letter all their lives, and had never seen, with their microscopes, the great figure of the Innocent Sufferer, so plain there. So they thought that the Cross demonstrated the hollowness of Jesus' trust in God, and the rejection of Him by God. Surely religious teachers should have been slow to scoff at religious trust, and surely they might have known that failure and disaster even to death were no signs of God's displeasure. But, in one aspect, they were right. It is a mystery that such a life should end thus; and the mystery is none the less because many another less holy life has also ended in suffering. But the mystery is solved when we know that God did not deliver Him, just because He 'would have Him,' and that the Father's delight in the Son reached its very highest point when He became obedient until death, and offered Himself 'a sacrifice acceptable, well pleasing unto God.'

III. We pass on to the darkness, desolation, and death. Matthew represents these three long hours from noon till what answers to our 3 P.M. as passed in utter silence by Christ. What went on beneath that dread veil, we are not meant to know. Nor do we need to ask its physical cause or extent. It wrapped the agony from cruel eyes; it symbolised the blackness of

desolation in His spirit, and by it God draped the heavens in mourning for man's sin. What were the onlookers doing then? Did they cease their mocking, and feel some touch of awe creeping over them?

‘ His brow was chill with dying,
And His soul was faint with loss.’

The cry that broke the awful silence, and came out of the darkness, was more awful still. The fewer our words the better; only we may mark how, even in His agony, Jesus has recourse to prophetic words, and finds in a lesser sufferer's cry voice for His desolation. Further, we may reverently note the marvellous blending of trust and sense of desertion. He feels that God has left Him, and yet he holds on to God. His faith, as a man, reached its climax in that supreme hour when, loaded with the mysterious burden of God's abandonment, He yet cried in His agony, ‘ My God!’ and that with reduplicated appeal. Separation from God is the true death, the ‘ wages of sin’; and in that dread hour He bore in His own consciousness the uttermost of its penalty. The physical fact of Christ's death, if it could have taken place without this desolation from the consciousness of separation from God, would not have been the bearing of all the consequences of man's sins. The two must never be parted in our grateful contemplations; and, while we reverently abjure the attempt to pierce into that which God hid from us by the darkness, we must reverently ponder what Christ revealed to us by the cry that cleft it, witnessing that He then was indeed bearing the whole weight of a world's sin. By the side of such thoughts, and in the presence of such sorrow, the clumsy jest of the bystanders, which caught at the half-heard words, and pretended to think

that Jesus was a crazy fanatic calling for Elijah with his fiery chariot to come and rescue Him, may well be passed by. One little touch of sympathy moistened His dying lips, not without opposition from the heartless crew who wanted to have their jest out. Then came the end. The loud cry of the dying Christ is worthy of record; for crucifixion ordinarily killed by exhaustion, and this cry was evidence of abundant remaining vitality. In accordance therewith, the fact of death is expressed by a phrase, which, though used for ordinary deaths, does yet naturally express the voluntariness of Christ. 'He sent away His spirit,' as if He had bid it depart, and it obeyed. Whether the expression may be fairly pressed so far or no, the fact is the same, that Jesus died, not because He was crucified, but because He chose. He was the Lord and Master of Death; and when He bid His armour-bearer strike, the slave struck, and the King died, not like Saul on the field of his defeat, but a victor in and by and over death.

THE BLIND WATCHERS AT THE CROSS

'And sitting down they watched Him there.'—MATT. xxvii. 36.

OUR thoughts are, rightly, so absorbed by the central Figure in this great chapter that we pass by almost unnoticed the groups round the cross. And yet there are large lessons to be learned from each of them. These rude soldiers, four in number, as we infer from John's Gospel, had no doubt joined with their comrades in the coarse mockery which preceded the sad procession to Calvary; and then they had to do the rough work of the executioners, fastening the sufferers to the rude wooden crosses, lifting these, with their burden,

fixing them into the ground, then parting the raiment. And when all that is done they sit stolidly down to take their ease at the foot of the cross, and idly to wait, with eyes that look and see nothing, until the sufferers die. A strange picture; and a strange thing to think of, how they were so close to the great event in the world's history, and had to stare at it for three or four hours, and never saw anything!

The lessons that the incident teaches us may be very simply gathered together.

I. First we infer from this the old truth of how ignorant men are of the real meaning and outcome of what they do.

These four Roman soldiers were foreigners; I suppose that they could not speak a word to a man in that crowd. They had no means of communication with them. They had had plenty of practice in crucifying Jews. It was part of their ordinary work in these troublesome times, and this was just one more. Think of what a corporal's guard of rough English soldiers, out in Northern India, would think if they were bidden to hang a native who was charged with rebellion against the British Government. So much, and not one whit more, did these men know of what they were doing; and they went back to their barracks, stolid and unconcerned, and utterly ignorant of what they had been about.

But in part it is so with us all, though in less extreme fashion. None of us know the real meaning, and none of us know the possible issues and outcome of a great deal of our lives. We are like people sowing seed in the dark; it is put into our hands and we sow. We do the deed; this end of it is in our power, but where it runs out to, and what will come of it, lie far beyond

our ken. We are compassed about, wherever we go, by this atmosphere of mystery, and enclosed within a great ring of blackness.

And so the simple lesson to be drawn from that clear fact, about all our conduct, is this—let results alone. Never mind about what you cannot get hold of; you cannot see to the other end, and you have nothing to do with it. You can see this end; make that right. Be sure that the motive is right, and then into whatever unlooked-for consequences your act may run out at the further end, you will be right. Never mind what kind of harvest is coming out of your deeds, you cannot forecast it. ‘Thou sowest not that body that shall be, but bare grain. . . . God giveth it a body as it pleaseth Him.’ Let alone that profitless investigation, the attempt to fashion and understand either the significance or the issues of your conduct, and stick fast by this—look after your motive for doing it, and your temper in doing it; and then be quite sure, ‘Thou shalt find it after many days,’ and the fruit will be ‘unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.’

II. Take another very simple and equally plain lesson from this incident, viz., the limitation of responsibility by knowledge.

These men, as I said, were ignorant of what they were doing, and, therefore, they were guiltless. Christ Himself said so: ‘They know not what they do.’ But it is marvellous to observe that whilst the people who stood round the cross, and were associated in the act that led Jesus there, had all degrees of responsibility, the least guilty of the whole were the men who did the actual work of nailing Him to the cross, and lifting it with Him upon it. These soldiers were not half as much to blame as were many of the men that stood by; and

just in the measure in which the knowledge or the possibility of knowledge increased, just in that measure did the responsibility increase. The high priest was a great deal more to blame than the Roman soldiers. The rude tool that nailed Christ to the cross, the hammer that was held in the hand of the legionary, was almost as much to blame as the hand that wielded it. For the hand that wielded it had very little more knowledge than it had.

In so far as it was possible that these men might have known something of what they were doing, in so far were they to blame; but remember what a very, very little light could possibly have shone upon these souls. If there is no light there cannot be any shadow; and if these men were, as certainly they were, all but absolutely ignorant, and never could have been anything else, of what they were doing, then they were all but absolutely guiltless. And so you come to this, which is only a paradox to superficial thinkers, that the men that did the greatest crime in the whole history of the world, did it with all but clean hands; and the people that were to be condemned were those who delivered 'the Just One' into the hands of more lawless, and therefore less responsible, men.

So here is the general principle, that as knowledge and light rise and fall, so responsibility rises and falls along with them. And therefore let us be thankful that we have not to judge one another, but that we have all to stand before that merciful and loving tribunal of the God who is a God of knowledge, and by whom actions are *weighed*, as the Old Book has it—not *counted*, but weighed. And let us be thankful, too, that we may extend our charity to all round us, and refrain from thinking of any man or woman that

we can pronounce upon their criminality, because we do not know the light in which they walk.

III. And now the last lesson, and the one that I most desire to lay upon your hearts, is this, how possible it is to look at Christ on the cross, and see nothing.

For half a day there they sat, and it was but a dying Jew that they saw, one of three. A touch of pity came into their hearts once or twice, alternating to mockery, which was not savage because it was simply brutal; but when it was all over, and they had pierced His side, and gone away back to their barracks, they had not the least notion that they, with their dim, purblind eyes, had been looking at the most stupendous miracle in the whole world's history, had been gazing at the thing into which angels desired to look; and had seen that to which the hearts and the gratitude of unconverted millions would turn for all eternity. They laid their heads down on their pillows that night and did not know what had passed before their eyes, and they shut the eyes that had served them so ill, and went to sleep, unconscious that they had seen the pivot on which the whole history of humanity had turned; and been the unmoved witnesses of 'God manifest in the flesh,' dying on the cross for the whole world, and for them. What should they have seen if they had seen the reality? They should have seen not a dying rebel but a dying Christ; they should have looked with emotion, they should have looked with faith, they should have looked with thankfulness.

Any one who looks at that cross, and sees nothing but a pure and perfect man dying upon it, is very nearly as blind as the Roman legionaries. Any one to whom it is only an example of perfect innocence

and patient suffering has only seen an inch into the Infinite; and the depths of it are as much concealed from him as they were from them. Any one who looks with an unmoved heart, without one thrill of gratitude, is nearly as blind as the rough soldiers. He that looks and does not say—

‘ My faith would lay her hand
On that dear head of Thine;
While like a penitent I stand
And there confess my sin,’

has not learned more of the meaning of the Cross than they did. And any one who looks to it, and then turns away and forgets, or who looks at it and fails to recognise in it the law of his own life and pattern for his own conduct, has yet to see more deeply into it before he sees even such portion of its meaning as here we can apprehend.

Oh! dear friends, we all of us, as the apostle says in one of his letters, have had this Christ ‘ manifestly set forth before us as if painted upon a placard upon a wall’ (for that is the meaning of the picturesque words that he employs). And if we look with calm, unmoved hearts; if we look without personal appropriation of that Cross and dying love to ourselves, and if we look without our hearts going out in thankfulness and laying themselves at His feet in a calm rapture of life-long devotion, then we need not wonder that four ignorant heathen men sat and looked at Him for four long hours and saw nothing, for we are as blind as ever they were.

You say, ‘ We see.’ Do you see? Do you look? Does the look touch your hearts? Have you fathomed the meaning of the fact? Is it to you the sacrifice of

the living Christ for your salvation? Is it to you the death on which all your hopes rest? You say that you see. Do you see that in it? Do you see your only ground of confidence and peace? And do you so see that, like a man who has looked at the sun for a moment or two, when you turn away your head you carry the image of what you beheld still stamped on your eyeball, and have it both as a memory and a present impression? So is the cross photographed on your heart; and is it true about us that every day, and all days, we behold our Saviour, and beholding Him are being changed into His likeness? Is it true about us that we thus bear about with us in the body 'the dying of the Lord Jesus'? If we look to Him with faith and love, and make His Cross our own, and keep it ever in our memory, ever before us as an inspiration and a hope and a joy and a pattern, then we see. If not, 'for judgment am I come into the world, that they which see not may see, and that they which see might be made blind.' For what men are so blind to the infinite pathos and tenderness, power, mystery, and miracle of the Cross, as the men and women who all their lives long have heard a Gospel which has been held up before their lack-lustre eyes, and have looked at it so long that they cannot see it any more?

Let us pray that our eyes may be purged, that we may see, and seeing may copy, that dying love of the ever-loving Lord.

TAUNTS TURNING TO TESTIMONIES

'... The chief priests mocking Him... said, 42. He saved others; Himself He cannot save. If He be the King of Israel, let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe Him. 43. He trusted in God; let Him deliver Him now, if He will have Him.'—MATT. xxvii. 41-43.

IT is an old saying that the corruption of the best is the worst. What is more merciful and pitiful than true religion? What is more merciless and malicious than hatred which calls itself 'religious'? These priests, like many a persecutor for religion since, came to feast their eyes on the long-drawn-out agonies of their Victim, and their rank tongues blossomed into foul speech. Characteristically enough, though they shared in the mockeries of the mob, they kept themselves separate. The crowd pressed near enough to the cross to speak their gibes *to* Jesus; the dignified movers of the ignorant crowd stood superciliously apart, and talked scoffingly *about* Him. Whilst the populace yelled, 'Thou that destroyest the Temple and buildest it in three days, come down,' the chief priests, with the scribes, looked at each other with a smile, and said, '*He* saved others; Himself *He* cannot save.'

Now, these brutal taunts have lessons for us. They witness to the popular impression of Christ, and what His claims were. He asserted Himself to be a worker of miracles, the Messiah-King of Israel, the Son of God, therefore He died. And they witness to the misconception which ruled in the minds of these priests as to the relation of His claims to the Cross. They thought that it had finally burst the bubble, and disposed once for all of these absurd and blasphemous pretensions. Was it credible that a man who possessed miraculous power should not, in this supreme moment,

use it to deliver Himself? Did not 'Physician, heal Thyself,' come in properly there? Would any of the most besotted followers of this pretender retain a rag of belief in His Messiahship if He was crucified? Could it be possible that, if there was a God at all, He should leave a man that really trusted in Him, not to say who was really His Son, to die thus? A cracked mirror gives a distorted image. The facts were seen, but their relation was twisted. If we will take the guidance of these gibes, and see what is the real explanation to the anomaly that they suggest, then we shall find that the taunts turn to Him for a testimony, and that 'out of the mouths' of mockers there is 'perfected praise.' The stones flung at the Master turn to roses strewed in His path.

I. So, then, first the Cross shows us the Saviour who could not save Himself.

The priests did not believe in Christ's miracles, and they thought that this final token of his impotence, as they took it to be, was clear proof that the miracles were either tricks or mistakes. They saw the two things, they fatally misunderstood the relation between them. Let *us* put the two things together.

Here, on the one hand, is a Man who has exercised absolute authority in all the realms of the universe, who has spoken to dead matter, and it has obeyed; who by His word has calmed the storm, and hushed the winds by His word, has multiplied bread, has transmuted pale water into ruddy wine; who has moved omnipotent amongst the disturbed minds and diseased bodies of men, who has cast His sovereign word into the depth and darkness of the grave, and brought out the dead, stumbling and entangled in the grave-clothes. All these are facts on the one side. And on the other

there is this—that there, passive, and, to superficial eyes, impotent, He hangs the helpless Victim of Roman soldiers and of Jewish priests. The short and easy vulgar way to solve the apparent contradiction was to deny the reality of the one of its members; to say ‘Miracles? Absurd! He never worked one, or He would have been working one now.’

But let their error lead us into truth, and let us grasp the relation of the two apparently contradictory facts. ‘He saved others,’ that is certain. He did not ‘save Himself,’ that is as certain. Was the explanation ‘cannot’? The priests by ‘cannot’ meant physical impossibility, defect of power, and they were wrong. But there is a profound sense in which the word ‘cannot’ is absolutely true. For this is in all time, and in all human relations, the law of service—sacrifice; and no man can truly help humanity, or an individual, unless he is prepared to surrender himself in the service. The lamp burns away in giving light. The fire consumes in warming the hearth, and no brotherly sympathy or help has ever yet been rendered, or ever will be, except at the price of self-surrender. Now, some people think that this is the whole explanation of our Lord’s history, both in His life and in His death. I do not believe that it is the whole explanation, but I do believe it carries us some way towards the central sanctuary, where the explanation lies. And yet it is not complete or adequate, because, to parallel Christ’s work with the work of any of the rest of us to our brethren, however beautiful, disinterested, self-oblivious, and self-consuming it may be, seems to me—I say it with deference, though I must here remember considerations of brevity and be merely assertive—entirely to ignore the unique special

characteristic of the work of Jesus Christ—viz., that it was the atonement for the sins of the world. He could not bear away our sins, unless the burden of them was laid on His own back, and He carried our griefs, our sorrows, our diseases, and our transgressions. 'He saved others, Himself He cannot save.' But the impossibility was purely the result of His own willing and obedient love; or, if I put it in more epigrammatic form, the priests' 'cannot' was partially true, but if they had said '*would not*' they would have hit the mark, and come to full truth. The reason for His death becomes clear, and each of the contrasted facts is enhanced, when we set side by side the opulence and ease of His manifold miracles and the apparent impotence and resourcelessness of the passive Victim on the cross.

That 'cannot' did not come from defect of power, but from plenitude of love, and it was a 'will not' in its deepest depths. For you will find scattered throughout Scripture, especially these Gospels, indications from our Lord's own lips, and by His own acts, that, in the truest and fullest sense, His sufferings were voluntary. 'No man taketh it from me'—He says about His life—'I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again.' And once He did choose to flash out for a moment the always present power, that we might learn that when it did not appear, it was not because he could not, but because he would not. When the soldiers came to lay their hands upon Him, He presented Himself before them, saving them all the trouble of search, and when He asked a question, and received the answer that it was He of whom they were in search, there came one sudden apocalypse of His majesty, and they fell to the ground, and lay there

prone before Him. They could have had no power at all against Him, except He had willed to surrender Himself to them. Again, though it is hypercritical perhaps to attach importance to what may only be natural idiomatic forms of speech, yet in this connection it is not to be overlooked that the language of all the Evangelists, in describing the supreme moment of Christ's death, is congruous with the idea that He died neither from the exhaustion of crucifixion, nor from the thrust of the soldier's spear, but because He would. For they all have expressions equivalent to that of one of them, 'He gave up His spirit.' Be that as it may, the 'cannot' was a 'will not'; and it was neither nails that fastened Him to the tree, nor violence that slew Him, but He was fixed there by His own steadfast will, and He died because He would. So if we rightly understand the 'cannot' we may take up with thankfulness the taunt which, as I say, is tuned to a testimony, and reiterate adoringly, 'He saved others, Himself He cannot save.'

II. The Cross shows us the King on His throne.

To the priests it appeared ludicrous to suppose that a King of Israel should, by Israel, be nailed upon the cross. 'Let Him come down, and we will believe Him.' They saw the two facts, they misconceived their relation. There was a relation between them, and it is not difficult for us to apprehend it.

The Cross is Christ's throne. There are two ways in which the tragedy of His crucifixion is looked at in the Gospels, one that prevails in the three first, another that prevails in the fourth. These two seem superficially to be opposite; they are complementary. It depends upon your station whether a point in the sky is your *zenith* or your *nadir*. Here it is your zenith;

at the antipodes it is the nadir. In the first three gospels the aspect of humiliation, degradation, inanition, suffering, is prominent in the references to the Crucifixion. In the *fourth* gospel the aspect of glory and triumph is uppermost. 'Even so must the Son of Man be lifted up'; 'I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto Me'; 'Now the hour is come that the Son of Man should be glorified.' And it *is* His glory, for on that Cross Jesus Christ manifests, in transcendent and superlative form, at once power and love that are boundless and divine. The Cross is the foundation of His kingdom. In his great passage in Philippians the Apostle brings together, in the closest causal connection, His obedience unto death, the death of the Cross, and His exaltation and reception of 'the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow.' The title over the Cross was meant for a gibe. It was a prophecy. By the Cross He becomes the 'King,' and not only the 'King of the Jews.' The sceptre that was put in His hand, though it was meant for a sneer, was a forecast of a truth, for He rules, not with a rod of iron, but with the reed of gentleness; and the crown of thorns, that was pressed down on His wounded and bleeding head, foretold for our faith the great truth that suffering is the foundation of dominion, and that men will bow as to their King and Lord before Him who died for them, with a prostration of spirit, a loyalty of allegiance, and an alertness of service, which none other, monarch or superior, may even dream of attaining. The Cross establishes, not destroys, Christ's dominion over men.

Yes; and that Cross wins their faith as nothing else can. The blind priests said, 'Let Him come down, and

we will believe Him.' Precisely because He did not come down, do sad and sorrowful and sinful hearts turn to Him from the ends of the earth, and from the distances of the ages pour the treasures of their trust and their love at His feet. Did you ever think how strange it is, except with one explanation, that the gibes of the priests did not turn out to be true? Why is it that Christ's shameful death did not burst the bubble, as they thought it had done? Why is it that in His case—and I was going to say, and it would have been no exaggeration, in His case only—the death of the leader did not result in the dispersion of the led? Why is it that His fate and future were the opposite of that of multitudes of other pseudo-Messiahs, of whom it is true that when they were slain their followers came to nought? Why? There is only one explanation, I think, and that is that the death was not the end, but that He rose again from the dead. My brother, you will either have to accept the Resurrection, with all that comes from it, or else you will have to join the ranks of the priests, and consider that Christ's death blew to atoms Christ's pretensions. If we know anything about Him, we know that He asserted miraculous power, Messiahship, and a filial relation to God. These things are facts. Did He rise or did He not? If He did not, He was an enthusiast. If He did, He is the King to whom our hearts can cleave, and to whom our loyalty is due.

III. Now, lastly, the Cross shows us the Son, beloved of the Father.

The priests thought that it was altogether incredible that His devotion should have been genuine, or His claim to be the Son of God should have any reality, since

the Cross, to their vulgar eyes, disproved them both. Like all coarse-minded people, they estimated character by condition, but they who do that make no end of mistakes. They had forgotten their own Prophecies, which might have told them that 'the Servant of the Lord in whom' His 'heart delighted,' was a suffering Servant. But whilst they recognised the facts, here again, as in the other two cases, they misconceived the relation. We have the means of rectifying the distorted image.

We ought to know, and to be sure, that the Cross of Christ was the very token that this was God's 'beloved Son in whom He was well pleased.' If we dare venture on the comparison of parts of that which is all homogeneous and perfect, we might say that in the moment of His death Jesus Christ was more than ever the object of the Father's delight.

Why? It is not my purpose now to enlarge upon all the reasons which might be suggested. Let me put them together in a sentence or two. In that Cross Jesus Christ revealed God as God's heart had always yearned to be revealed, infinite in love, pitifulness, forbearance, and pardoning mercy. There was the highest manifestation of the glory of God. 'What?' you say, 'a poor weak Man, hanging on a cross, and dying in the dark—is *that* the very shining apex of all that humanity can know of divinity?' Yes, for it is the pure manifestation that God is Love. Therefore the whole sunshine of the Father's presence rested on the dying Saviour. It was the hour when God most delighted in Him, if I may venture the comparison, for the other reasons that then He carried filial obedience to its utmost perfection, that then His trust

in God was deepest, even at the hour when His spirit was darkened by the cloud that the world's sin, which He was carrying, had spread thunders between Him and the sunshine of the Father's face. For in that mysterious voice, which we can never understand in its depths, there were blended trust and desolation, each in its highest degree: 'My God! my God! Why hast Thou forsaken Me?' And the Cross was the complete carrying out of God's dearest purpose for the world, that He might be 'just, and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus.' Therefore, then—I was going to say as never before—was Christ His Son, in whom He delighted.

Brethren, let us, led by the errors of these scoffers, grasp the truths that they pervert. Let us see that weak Man hanging helpless on the cross, whose 'cannot' is the impotence of omnipotence, imposed by His own loving will to save a world by the sacrifice of Himself. Let us crown Him our King, and let our deepest trust and our gladdest obedience be rendered to Him because He did not come down from, but 'endured, the cross.' Let us behold with wonder, awe, and endless love the Father not withholding His only Son, but 'delivering Him up to the death for us all,' and from the empty grave and the occupied Throne let us learn how the Father by both proclaims to all the world concerning Him hanging dying on the cross: '*This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.*'

THE VEIL RENT

'Behold, the veil of the Temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom.'
MATT. xxvii. 51.

As I suppose we are all aware, the Jewish Temple was divided into three parts: the Outer Court, open to all; the Holy Place, to which the ministering priests had daily access to burn incense and trim the lamps; and the Holy of Holies, where only the High Priest was permitted to go, and that but once a year, on the great Day of Atonement. For the other three hundred and sixty-four days the shrine lay silent, untrodden, dark. Between it and the less sacred Holy Place hung the veil, whose heavy folds only one man was permitted to lift or to pass. To all others it was death to peer into the mysteries, and even to him, had he gone at another time, and without the blood of the sacrifice, death would have ensued.

If we remember all this and try to cast ourselves back in imagination to the mental attitude of the ordinary Jew, the incident of my text receives its true interpretation. At the moment when the loud cry of the dying Christ rung over the heads of the awestruck multitude, that veil was, as it were, laid hold of by a pair of giant hands and torn asunder, as the Evangelist says, 'from the top to the bottom.' The incident was a symbol. In one aspect it proclaimed the end of the long years of Israel's prerogative. In another it ushered in an epoch of new relations between man and God. If Jesus Christ was what He said He was, if His death was what He declared it to be, it was fitting that it should be attended by a train of subordinate and interpreting wonders. These were, besides that of my text,

the darkened sun, the trembling earth, the shivered rocks, the open graves, the rising saints—all of them, in their several ways, illuminating the significance of that death on Calvary.

Not less significant is this symbol of my text, and I desire now to draw your attention to its meanings.

I. The rent veil proclaims the desecrated temple.

There is a striking old legend, preserved by the somewhat mendacious historian of the Jewish people, that, before Jerusalem fell, the anxious watchers heard from within the sanctuary a great voice saying, 'Let us depart hence!' and through the night were conscious of the winnowing of the mighty wings of the withdrawing cherubim. And soon a Roman soldier tossed a brand into the most Holy Place, and the 'beautiful house where their fathers praised was burned with fire.' The legend is pathetic and significant. But that 'departing' had taken place forty years before; and at the moment when Jesus 'gave up the ghost,' purged eyes might have seen the long trail of brightness as the winged servitors of the Most High withdrew from the desecrated shrine. The veil rent declared that the sacred soil within it was now common as any foot of earth in Galilee; and its rending, so to speak, made way for a departing God.

That conception, that the death of Christ Jesus was the *de-consecration*—if I may coin a word—of the Temple, and the end of all its special sanctity, and that thenceforward the Presence had departed from it, is distinctly enough taught us by Himself in words which move in the same circle of ideas as that in which the symbol resides. You remember, no doubt, that, if we accept the testimony of John's Gospel, at the very beginning of our Lord's ministry He vindicated His

authority to cleanse the sanctuary against the cavils of the sticklers for propriety by the enigmatical words, 'Destroy this Temple, and in three days I will build it up,' to which the Evangelist appends the comment, 'He spake of the Temple of His body,' that body in which 'all the fulness of the Godhead' dwelt, and which was, and is to-day, all that the Temple shadowed and foretold, the dwelling-place of God in humanity, the place of sacrifice, the meeting-place between God and man. But just because our Lord in these dark words predicted His death and His resurrection, He also hinted the destruction of the literal stone and lime building, and its rearing again in nobler and more spiritual form. When He said, 'Destroy this Temple,' He implied, secondarily, the destruction of the house in which He stood, and laid that destruction, whensoever it should come to pass, at their doors. And, inasmuch as the saying in its deepest depth meant His death by their violence and craft, therefore, in that early saying of His, was wrapped up the very same truth which was symbolised by the rent veil, and was bitterly fulfilled at last. When they slew Christ they killed the system under which they lived, and for which they would have been glad to die, in a zeal without knowledge; and destroyed the very Temple on the distorted charge of being the destroyer of which, they handed Him over to the Roman power.

The death of Christ is, then, the desecration and the destruction of that Temple. Of course it is; because when a nation that had had millenniums of education, of forbearance, of revelation, turned at last upon the very climax and brightest central light of all the Revelation, standing there amongst them in a bodily form, there was nothing more to be done. God had

shot His last arrow; His quiver was empty. 'Last of all He sent unto them His Son, saying,' with a wistful kind of half-confidence, 'They will reverence My Son,' and the divine expectation was disappointed, and exhaustless Love was empty-handed, and all was over. He could turn to themselves and say, 'Judge between Me and My vineyard. What more could have been done that I have not done to it?' Therefore, there was nothing left but to let the angels of destruction loose, and to call for the Roman eagles with their broad-spread wings, and their bloody beaks, and their strong talons, to gather together round the carcass. When He gave up the Ghost, 'the veil of the Temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom.'

A time of repentance was given. It was possible for the most guilty participator in that judicial murder to have his gory hands washed and made white in the very blood that he had shed; but, failing repentance, that death was the death of Israel, and the destruction of Israel's Temple. Let us take the lesson, dear brethren. If we turn away from that Saviour, and refuse the offered gifts of His love, there is no other appeal left in the power of Heaven; and there is nothing for it after that except judgment and destruction. We can 'crucify the Son of God afresh and put Him to an open shame.' And the hearts that are insensitive, as are some of our hearts, to that great love and grace, are capable of nothing except to be pulverised by means of a judgment. Repentance is possible for us all, but, failing that, the continuance of rejection of Christ is the pulling down, on our own heads, of the ruins of the Temple, like the Israelitish hero in his blindness and despair.

II. Now, secondly, the rent veil means, in another

way of looking at the incident, light streaming in on the mystery of God.

Let me recall to your imaginations what lay behind that heavy veil. In the Temple, in our Lord's time, there was no presence of the Shekinah, the light that symbolised the divine presence. There was the mercy-seat, with the outstretched wings of the cherubim; there were the dimly pictured forms on the tapestry hangings; there was silence deep as death; there was darkness absolute and utter, whilst the Syrian sun was blazing down outside. Surely that is the symbol of the imperfect knowledge or illumination as to the divine nature which is over all the world. 'The veil is spread over all nations, and the covering over all people.' And surely that sudden, sharp tearing asunder of the obscuring medium, and letting the bright sunlight stream into every corner of the dark chamber, is for us a symbol of the great fact that in the life, and especially in the death, of Jesus Christ our Lord, we have light thrown in to the depths of God.

What does that Cross tell us about God that the world did not know? And how does it tell us? and why does it tell us? It tells us of absolute righteousness, of that in the divine nature which cannot tolerate sin; of the stern law of retribution which must be wrought out, and by which the wages of every sin is death. It tells us not only of a divine righteousness which sees guilt and administers punishment, but it tells us of a divine love, perfect, infinite, utter, perennial, which shrinks from no sacrifice, which stoops to the lowest conditions, which itself takes upon it all the miseries of humanity, and which dies because it loves and will save men from death. And as we look upon that dying Man hanging

on the cross, the very embodiment and consummation of weakness and of shame, we have to say, 'Lo! this is our God! We have waited for Him'—through all the weary centuries—'and He will save us.' How does it tell us all this? Not by eloquent and gracious thoughts, not by sweet and musical words, but by a deed. The only way by which we can know men is by what they do. The only way by which we know God is by what He does. And so we point to that Cross and say, 'There! not in words, not in thoughts, not in speculations, not in hopes and fears and peradventures and dim intuitions, but in a solid fact; there is the Revelation which lays bare the heart of God, and shows us its very throbbing of love to every human soul.' 'The veil was rent in twain from the top to the bottom.'

The Cross will reveal God to you only if you believe that Jesus Christ was the Incarnate Word. Brethren, if that death was but the death of even the very holiest, noblest, sweetest, perfectest soul that ever lived on earth and breathed human breath, there is no revelation of God in it for us. It tells us what Jesus was, and by a very roundabout inference may suggest something of what the divine nature is, but unless you can say, as the New Testament says, 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. . . . And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only Begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth,' I fail to see how the death of Christ can be a revelation of the love of God.

I need not occupy time in dilating upon the contrast between this solid certitude, and all that the world, apart from Jesus Christ, has to lay hold of about God. We want something else than mist on which

to build, and on which to lay hold. And there is a substantial, warm, flesh-and-blood hand, if I may so say, put out to us through the mist when we believe in Christ the Son of God, who died on the cross for us all. Then, amidst whirling mists and tossing seas, there is a fixed point to which we can moor; then our confidence is built, not on peradventures or speculations or wishes or dreams or hopes, but on a historical fact, and grasping that firm we may stand unmoved.

Dear friends, I may be very old-fashioned and very narrow—I suppose I am; but I am bound to declare my conviction, which I think every day's experience of the tendency of thought only makes more certain, that, practically for this generation, the choice lies between accepting the life and death of Jesus Christ as the historical Revelation of God, or having no knowledge of Him—*knowledge*, I say,—of Him at all; you must choose between the barred sanctuary, within which lies couched a hidden Something—with a capital S—or perhaps a hidden Someone whom you never can know and never will; or the rent veil, rent by Christ's death, through which you can pass, and behold the mercy-seat and, above the outstretched wings of the adoring cherubim, the Father whose name is Love.

III. Lastly, the rent veil permits any and every man to draw near to God.

You remember what I have already said as to the jealous guarding of the privacy of that inner shrine, and how not only the common herd of the laity, but the whole of the priesthood, with the solitary exception of its titular head, were shut out from ever entering it. In the old times of Israel there was only one man alive at once who had ever been beyond the veil. And now that it is rent, what does that show but this, that

by the death of Jesus Christ any one, every one, is welcome to pass in to the very innermost sanctuary, and to dwell, nestling as close as he will, to the very heart of the throned God? There is a double veil, if I may so say, between man and God: the side turned outward is woven by our own sins; and the other turned inwards is made out of the necessary antagonism of the divine nature to man's sin. There hangs the veil, and when the Psalmist asked, 'Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord; or who shall stand in His holy place?' he was putting a question which echoes despairingly in the very heart of all religions. And he answered it as conscience ever answers it when it gets fair play: 'He that hath clean hands and a pure heart, who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity.' And where or who is he? Nowhere; nobody. Access is barred, because it is impossible that a holy and righteous God should communicate the selectest gifts of His love, even the sense of His favour, and of harmony and fellowship with Him, to sinful men, and barred, because it is impossible that men, with the consciousness of evil and the burden of guilt sometimes chafing their shoulders, and always bowing down their backs, should desire to possess, or be capable of possessing, that fellowship and union with God. A black, frowning wall, if I may change the metaphor of my text, rises between us and God. But One comes with the sacrificial vessel in His hand, and pours His blood on the barrier, and that melts the black blocks that rise between us and God, and the path is patent and permeable for every foot. 'The veil of the Temple was rent in twain' when Christ died. That death, because it is a sacrifice, makes it possible that the whole fulness of the divine love should be poured upon man. That death moves

our hearts, takes away our sense of guilt, draws us nearer to Him; and so both by its operation—not on the love of God—but on the government of God, and by its operation on the consciousness of men, throws open the path into His very presence.

If I might use abstract words, I would say that Christ's death potentially opens the path for every man, which being put into plain English—which is better—is just that by the death of Christ every man can, if he will, go to God, and live beside Him. And our faith is our personal laying hold of that great sacrifice and treading on that path. It turns the 'potentiality' into an actuality, the possibility into a fact. If we believe on Him who died on the cross for us all, then by that way we come to God, than which there is none other given under heaven among men.

So all believers are priests, or none of them are. The absolute right of direct access to God, without the intervention of any man who has an officially greater nearness to Him than others, and through whom as through a channel the grace of sacrament comes, is contained in the great symbol of my text. And it is a truth that this day needs. On the one hand there is agnostic unbelief, which needs to see in the rent veil the illumination streaming through it on to the depths of God; and on the other hand there is the complementary error—and the two always breed each other—the superstition which drags back by an anachronism the old Jewish notions of priesthood into the Christian Church. It needs to see in the rent veil the charter of universal priesthood for all believers, and to hearken to the words which declare, 'Ye are a chosen generation, a spiritual house, a royal priesthood, that ye should offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable unto God by

Jesus Christ.' That is the lesson that this day wants. 'Having, therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest of all, by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which He has consecrated for us through the veil, that is His flesh, let us draw near with true hearts in full assurance of faith.'

THE PRINCE OF LIFE

'In the end of the Sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulchre. 2. And, behold, there was a great earthquake: for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it. 3. His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow: 4. And for fear of him the keepers did shake, and became as dead men. 5. And the angel answered and said unto the women, Fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified. 6. He is not here: for He is risen, as He said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay. 7. And go quickly, and tell His disciples that He is risen from the dead; and, behold, He goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see Him: lo, I have told you. 8. And they departed quickly from the sepulchre with fear and great joy; and did run to bring His disciples word. 9. And as they went to tell His disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, All hail. And they came and held Him by the feet, and worshipped Him. 10. Then said Jesus unto them, Be not afraid: go tell My brethren that they go into Galilee, and there shall they see Me. 11. Now, when they were going, behold, some of the watch came into the city, and shewed unto the chief priests all the things that were done. 12. And when they were assembled with the elders, and had taken counsel, they gave large money unto the soldiers, 13. Saying, Say ye, His disciples came by night, and stole Him away while we slept. 14. And if this come to the governor's ears, we will persuade him, and secure you. 15. So they took the money, and did as they were taught: and this saying is commonly reported among the Jews until this day.'—MATT. xxviii. 1-15.

THE attempts at harmonising the resurrection narratives are not only unsatisfactory, but they tend to blur the distinctive characteristics of each account. We shall therefore confine ourselves entirely to Matthew's version, and leave the others alone, with the simple remark that a condensed report of a series of events does not deny what it omits, nor contradict a fuller one. The peculiarities of Matthew's last chapter are largely due to the purpose of his gospel. Throughout, it has been the record of the Galilean ministry, the picture of the King of Israel, and of His treatment by those who should have been His subjects. This chapter estab-

lishes the fact of His resurrection; but, passing by the Jerusalem appearances of the risen Lord, as being granted to individuals and having less bearing on His royalty, emphasises two points: His rejection by the representatives of the nation, whose lie is endorsed by popular acceptance; and the solemn assumption, in Galilee, so familiar to the reader, of universal dominion, with the world-wide commission, in which the kingdom bursts the narrow national limits and becomes co-extensive with humanity. It is better to learn the meaning of Matthew's selection of his incidents than to wipe out instructive peculiarities in the vain attempt after harmony.

First, notice his silence (in which all the four narratives are alike) as to the time and circumstances of the resurrection itself. That had taken place before the grey twilight summoned the faithful women, and before the earthquake and the angel's descent. No eye saw Him rise. The guards were not asleep, for the statement that they were is a lie put into their mouths by the rulers; but though they kept jealous watch, His rising was invisible to them. 'The prison was shut with all safety,' for the stone was rolled away after He was risen, 'and the keepers standing before the doors,' but there was 'no man within.' As in the evening of that day He appeared in the closed chamber, so He passed from the sealed grave. Divine decorum required that that transcendent act should be done without mortal observers of the actual rising of the Sun which scatters for ever the darkness of death.

Matthew next notices the angel ministrant and herald. His narrative leaves the impression that the earthquake and appearance of the angel immediately preceded the arrival of the women, and the 'Behold!'

suggests that they felt and saw both. But that is a piece of chronology on which there may be difference of opinion. The other narratives tell of two angels. Matthew's mention of one only may be due either to the fact that one was speaker, or to the subjective impressions of his informant, who saw but the one, or to variation in the number visible at different times. We know too little of the laws which determine their appearances to be warranted in finding contradiction or difficulty here. The power of seeing may depend on the condition of the beholder. It may depend, not as with gross material bodies, on optics, but on the volition of the radiant beings seen. They may pass from visibility to its opposite, lightly and repeatedly, flickering into and out of sight, as the Pleiades seem to do. Where there is such store of possibilities, he is rash who talks glibly about contradictions.

Of far more value is it to note the purpose served by this waiting angel. We heard much of a herald angel of the Lord in the story of the Nativity. We hear nothing of him during the life of Christ. Now again he appears, as the stars, quenched in the noontide, shine again when the sun is out of the sky. He attends as humble servitor, in token that the highest beings gazed on that empty grave with reverent adoration, and were honoured by being allowed to guard the sacred place. Death was an undreaded thing to them, and no hopes for themselves blossomed from Christ's grave; but He who had lain in it was their King as well as ours, and new lessons of divine love were taught them, as they wondered and watched. They come to minister by act and word to the weeping women's faith and joy. Their appearance paralyses the guards, who would have kept the Marys

from the grave. They roll away the great circular stone, which women's hands, however nerved by love, could not have moved in its grooves. They speak tender words to them. There by the empty tomb, the strong heavenly and the weak earthly lovers of the risen King meet together, and clasp hands of help, the pledge and first-fruits of the standing order henceforth, and the inauguration of their office of 'ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for . . . heirs of salvation.' The risen Christ hath made both one. The servants of the same King must needs be friends of one another.

The angel's words fall into three parts. First, he calms fears by the assurance that the seekers for Christ are dear to Him. 'Fear not *ye*' glances at the prostrate watchers, and almost acknowledges the reasonableness of their abject terror. To them he could not but be hostile, but to hearts that longed for their and his Lord, he and all his mighty fellows were brethren. Let us learn that all God's angels are our lovers and helpers, if we love and seek for Jesus. Superstition has peopled the gulf between God and man with crowds of beings; revelation assures us that it is full of creatures who excel in strength. Men have cowered before them, but 'whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers,' our King was their Creator, and is their Sovereign, and, if we serve Him, all these are on our side. The true deliverer from superstitious terrors is the risen Christ. Again, the angel announces in simplest words the glorious fact, 'He is risen,' and helps them to receive it by a double way. He reminds them of Christ's own words, which had seemed so mysterious and had turned out so simple, so incredible, and now had proved so true. He calls them with a smile of welcome to draw near,

and with him to look into the empty place. The invitation extends to us all, for the one assurance of immortality; and the only answer to the despairing question, 'If a man die, shall he live again?' which is solid enough to resist the corrosion of modern doubt as of ancient ignorance, is that empty grave, and the filled throne, which was its necessary consequence. By it we measure the love that stooped so low, we school our hearts to anticipate without dread or reluctance our own lying down there, we fasten our faith on the risen Forerunner, and rejoice in the triumphant assurance of a living Christ. If the wonder of the women's stunned gaze is no more ours, our calm acceptance of the familiar fact need be none the less glad, and our estimate of its far-reaching results more complete than their tumult of feeling permitted to them.

No wonder that, swiftly, new duty which was privilege followed on the new, glad knowledge. It was emphatically 'a day of good tidings,' and they could not hold their peace. A brief glance, enough for certitude and joy, was permitted; and then, with urgent haste, they are sent to be apostles to the Apostles. The possession of the news of a risen Saviour binds the possessors to be its preachers. Where it is received in any power, it will impel to utterance. He who can keep silence has never felt, as he ought, the worth of the word, nor realised the reason why he has seen the Cross or the empty grave. 'He goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see.' It was but two complete days and one night since Christ had said to the disciples that He would rise again, and, as the Shepherd of the scattered flock, go before them into Galilee. How long ago since that saying it would seem! The reasons for Matthew's

omission of all the other appearances of our Lord in Jerusalem, with the exception of the one which immediately follows, and for the stress he lays on this rendezvous in their native Galilee, have already been touched on, and need not detain us now.

The next point in the narrative is the glad interview with the risen Jesus. The women had been at the grave but for a few moments. But they lived more in these than in years of quiet. Time is very elastic, and five minutes or five seconds may change a life. These few moments changed a world. Haste, winged by fear which had no torment, and by joy which found relief in swift movement, sent them running, forgetful of conventional proprieties, towards the awakening city. Probably Mary Magdalene had left them, as soon as they saw the open grave, and had hurried back alone to tell the tidings. And now the crowning joy and wonder comes. How simply it is told!—the introductory ‘Behold!’ just hinting at the wonderfulness, and perhaps at the suddenness, of our Lord’s appearance, and the rest being in the quietest and fewest words possible. Note the deep significance of the name ‘Jesus’ here. The angel spoke of ‘the Lord,’ but all the rest of the chapter speaks of ‘Jesus.’ The joy and hope that flow from the Resurrection depend on the fact of His humanity. He comes out of the grave, the same brother of our mortal flesh as before. It was no phantom whose feet they clasped, and He is not withdrawn from them by His mysterious experience. All through the Resurrection histories and the narrative of the forty days, the same emphasis attaches to the name, which culminates in the angel’s assurance at the Ascension, that ‘this same Jesus,’ in His true humanity, who has gone up on high our Forerunner, shall come

again our Brother and our Judge. 'It is *Christ* that died, yea rather, that is risen again'; but that triumphant assurance loses all its blessedness, unless we say too, '*Jesus* died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and . . . rose again the third day.'

Note, too, the calmness of His greeting. He uses the common form of salutation, as if He had but been absent on some common occasion, and met them in ordinary circumstances. He speaks out of His own deep tranquillity, and desires to impart it to their agitated spirits. He would calm their joy, that it may be the deeper, like His own. If we may give any weight to the original meaning of the formula of greeting which He employs, we may see blessed prophecy in it. The lips of the risen Christ bid us all 'rejoice.' His salutation is no empty wish, but a command which makes its own fulfilment possible. If our hearts welcome Him, and our faith is firm in His risen power and love, then He gives us a deep and central gladness, which nothing

'That is at enmity with joy
Can utterly abolish or destroy.'

The rush to His feet, and the silent clasp of adoration, are eloquent of a tumult of feeling most natural, and yet not without turbid elements, which He does not wholly approve. We have not here the prohibition of such a touch which was spoken to Mary, but we have substantially the same substitution, by His command, of practical service for mere emotion. That carries a lesson always in season. We cannot love Christ too much, nor try to get too near Him, to touch Him with the hand of our faith. But there have been modes of religious emotion, represented by hymns and popular

books, which have not mingled reverence rightly with love, and have spoken of Him, and of the emotions binding us to Him, in tones unwholesomely like those belonging to earthly passion. But, apart from that, Jesus taught these women, and us through them, that it is better to proclaim His Resurrection than to lie at His feet; and that, however sweet the blessedness which we find in Him may be, it is meant to put a message into our lips, which others need. Our sight of Him gives us something to say, and binds us to say it. It was a blessing to the women to have work to do, in doing which their strained emotions might subside. It was a blessing to the mournful company in the upper room to have their hearts prepared for His coming by these heralds. It was a wonderful token of His unchanged love, and an answer to fears and doubts of how they might find Him, that He sends the message to them as brethren.

In the hurry of that Easter morning, they had no time to ponder on all that it had brought them. The Resurrection as the demonstration of Christ's divinity and of the acceptance of His perfect sacrifice, or as the pledge of their resurrection, or as the type of their Christian life, was for future experience to grasp. For that day, it was enough to pass from despair to joy, and to let the astounding fact flood them with sunny hope.

We know the vast sweep of the consequences and consolations of it far better than they did. There is no reason, in our distance from it, for its diminishing either in magnitude, in certitude, or in blessedness in our eyes. No fact in the history of the world stands on such firm evidence as the resurrection of Jesus Christ. No age of the world ever needed to believe it more

than this one does. It becomes us all to grasp it for ourselves with an iron tenacity of hold, and to echo, in the face of the materialisms and know-nothing philosophy of this day, the old ringing confession, 'Now is Christ risen from the dead!'

We need say little about the last point in this narrative—the obstinate blindness of the rulers, and their transparent lie to account for the empty grave. The guard reports to the rulers, not to the governor, as they had been handed over by Pilate for special service. But they were Roman soldiers, as appears from the danger which the rulers provided against, that of their alleged crime against military discipline, in sleeping at their post, coming to his ears. The trumped-up story is too puerile to have taken in any one who did not wish to believe it. How could they tell what happened when they were asleep? How could such an operation as forcing back a heavy stone, and exhuming a corpse, have been carried on without waking them? How could such a timid set of people have mustered up courage for such a bold act? What did they do it for? Not to bury their Lord. He had been lovingly laid there by reverent hands, and costly spices strewn upon the sacred limbs. The only possible motive would be that the disciples might tell lies about His resurrection. That hypothesis that the Resurrection was a deliberately concocted falsehood has proved too strong for the stomach of modern unbelief, and has been long abandoned, as it had need to be. When figs grow on thistles, such characters as the early Christians, martyrs, heroes, saints, will be produced by a system which has a lie, known to be one, for its foundation. But the lame story is significant in two ways. It confesses, by its desperate attempt to turn the corner of

the difficulty, that the great rock, on which all denials of Christ's resurrection split, is the simple question—If He did not rise again, what became of the body? The priests' answer is absurd, but it, at all events, acknowledges that the grave was empty, and that it is incumbent to produce an explanation which reasonable men can accept without laughter.

Further, this last appearance of the rulers in the gospel is full of tragic significance, and is especially important to Matthew, whose narrative deals especially with Jesus as the King and Messiah of Israel. This is the end of centuries of prophecy and patience! This is what all God's culture of His vineyard has come to! The husbandmen cast the Heir out of the vineyard, and slew him. But there was a deeper depth than even that. They would not be persuaded when He rose again from the dead. They entrenched themselves in a lie, which only showed that they had a glimmering of the truth and hated it. And the lie was willingly swallowed by the mass of the nation, who thereby showed that they were of the same stuff as they who made it. A conspiracy or falsehood, which knew itself to be such, was the last act of that august council of Israel. It is an awful lesson of the penalties of unfaithfulness to the light possessed, an awful instance of 'judicial blindness.' So sets the sun of Israel. And therefore Matthew's Gospel turns away from the apostate nation, which has rejected its King, to tell, in its last words, of His assumption of universal dominion, and of the passage of the glad news from Israel to the world.

THE RISEN LORD'S GREETINGS AND GIFTS

'And as they went to tell His disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, All hail.'—MATT. xxviii. 9.

'Then the same day at evening . . . came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you.'—JOHN xx. 19.

So did our Lord greet His sad followers. The first of these salutations was addressed to the women as they hurried in the morning from the empty tomb bewildered; the second to the disciples assembled in the upper room in the evening of the same day. Both are ordinary greetings. The first is that usual in Greek, and literally means 'Rejoice'; the second is that common in Hebrew. The divergence between the two may be owing to the Evangelist Matthew having rendered the words which our Lord actually did speak, in the tongue familiar to His time, into their equivalent Greek. But whatever account may be given of the divergence does not materially affect the significance which I find in the salutations. And I desire to turn to them for a few moments now, because I think that, if we ponder them, we may gain some precious lessons from these Easter greetings of the Lord Himself.

I. First, then, notice their strange and majestic simplicity.

He meets His followers after Calvary and the Tomb and the Resurrection, with the same words with which two casual acquaintances, after some slight absence, might salute one another by the way. Their very simplicity is their sublimity here. For think of what tremendous experiences He had passed through since they saw Him last, and of what a rush of rapture and disturbance of joy shook the minds of the disciples, and then estimate the calm and calming power of that

matter-of-fact and simple greeting. It bears upon its very front the mark of truth. Would anybody have imagined the scene so? There have been one or two great poets who might conceivably have risen to the height of putting such words under such circumstances into the mouths of creatures of their own imagination. Analogous instances of the utmost simplicity of expression in moments of intense feeling may be quoted from Æschylus or Shakespeare, and are regarded as the high-water marks of genius. But does any one suppose that these evangelists were exceptionally gifted souls of that sort, or that they could have imagined anything like this—so strange in its calm, so unnatural at first sight, and yet vindicating itself as so profoundly natural and sublime—unless for the simple reason that they had heard it themselves, or been told it by credible witnesses? Neither the delicate pencil of the great dramatic genius nor the coarser brush of legend can have drawn such an incident as this, and it seems to me that the only reasonable explanation of it is that these greetings are what He really did say.

For, as I have remarked, unnatural as it seems at first sight, if we think for a moment, the very simplicity and calm, and, I was going to say, the *matter-of-factness*, of such a greeting, as the first that escaped from lips that had passed through death and yet were red and vocal, is congruous with the deepest truths of His nature. He has come from that tremendous conflict, and He reappears, not flushed with triumph, nor bearing any trace of effort, but surrounded as by a nimbus with that strange tranquillity which evermore enwrapped Him. So small does the awful scene which He has passed through seem to this

divine-human Man, and so utterly are the old ties and bonds unaffected by it, that when He meets His followers, all He has to say to them as His first greeting is, 'Peace be unto you!'—the well-worn salutation that was bandied to and fro in every market-place and scene where men were wont to meet. Thus He indicates the divine tranquillity of His nature; thus He minimises the fact of death; thus He reduces it to its true insignificance as a parenthesis across which may pass unaffected all sweet familiarities and loving friendships; thus He reknits the broken ties, and, though the form of their intercourse is hereafter to be profoundly modified, the substance of it remains, whereof He giveth assurance unto them in these His first words from the dead. So, as to a man standing on some mountain plateau, the deep gorges which seam it become invisible, and the unbroken level runs right on. So, there are a marvellous proof of the majesty and tranquillity of the divine Man, a glorious manifestation of His superiority over death; a blessed assurance of the reknitting of all ancient ties, after it as before it, coming to us from pondering on the trivial words—trivial from other lips, but profoundly significant on His—wherewith He greeted His servants when He rose again from the dead.

II. Then note, secondly, the universal destination of the greetings of the risen Lord.

I have said that it is possibly a mere accident that we should have the two forms of salutation preserved for us here; and that it is quite conceivable that our Lord really spoke but one, which has been preserved unaltered from its Hebrew or Aramaic original in John, and rendered by its Greek equivalent by the Evangelist Matthew.

But be that as it may, I cannot help feeling that in this fact, that the one salutation is the common greeting among Greek-speaking peoples, and the other the common greeting amongst Easterns, we may permissibly find the thought of the universal aspect of the gifts and greetings of the risen Christ. He comes to all men, and each man hears Him, 'in his own tongue wherein he was born,' breathing forth to him greetings which are promises, and promises which are gifts. Just as the mocking inscription on the Cross proclaimed, in 'Hebrew and Greek and Latin,' the three tongues known to its readers, the one kingdom of the crucified King—so in the greetings from the grave, the one declares that, to all the desires of eager, ardent, sensuous, joy-loving Westerns, and all the aspirations of repose-loving Easterns, who had had bitter experience of the pangs and pains of a state of warfare, Jesus Christ is ready to respond and to bring answering gifts. Whatsoever any community or individual has conceived as its highest ideal of blessedness and of good, that the risen Christ hath in His hands to bestow. He takes men's ideals of blessedness, and deepens and purifies and refines them.

The Greek notion of joy as being the good to be most wished for those dear to us, is but a shallow one. They had to learn, and their philosophy and their poetry and their art came to corruption because they would not learn, that the corn of wheat must be cast into the ground and die before it bring forth fruit. They knew little of the blessing and meaning of sorrow, and therefore the false glitter passed away, and the pursuit of the ideal became gross and foul and sensuous. And, on the other hand, the Jew, with

his longing for peace, had an equally shallow and unworthy conception of what it meant, and what was needed to produce it. If he had only external concord with men, and a competency of outward good within his reach without too much trouble, he thought that because he 'had much goods laid up for many years' he might 'take his ease; and eat, and drink, and be merry.' But Jesus Christ comes to satisfy both aspirations by contradicting both, and to reveal to Greek and Jew how much deeper and diviner was his desire than he dreamed it to be; and, therefore, how impossible it was to find the joy that would last, in the dancing fireflies of external satisfactions or the delights of art and beauty; and how impossible it was to find the repose that ennobled and was wedded to action, in anything short of union with God.

The Lord Christ comes out of the grave in which He lay for every man, and brings to each man's door, in a dialect intelligible to the man himself, the satisfaction of the single soul's aspirations and ideals, as well as of the national desires. His gifts and greetings are of universal destination, meant for us all and adapted for us each.

III. Then, thirdly, notice the unfailing efficacy of the Lord's greetings.

Look at these people to whom He spoke. Remember what they were between the Friday and the Sunday morning; utterly cowed and beaten, the women, in accordance with the feminine nature, apparently more deeply touched by the personal loss of the Friend and Comforter; and the men apparently, whilst sharing that sorrow, also touched by despair at the going to water of all the hopes that they had been building

upon His official character and position. 'We trusted that it had been He which should have redeemed Israel,' they said, 'as they walked and were sad.' They were on the point of parting. The Keystone withdrawn, the stones were ready to fall apart. Then came *something*—let us leave a blank for a moment—then came *something*; and those who had been cowards, dissolved in sorrow and relaxed by despair, in eight-and-forty hours became heroes. From that time, when, by all reasonable logic and common sense applied to men's motives, the Crucifixion should have crushed their dreams and dissolved their society, a precisely opposite effect ensues, and not only did the Church continue, but the men changed their characters, and became, somehow or other, full of these very two things which Christ wished for them—namely, joy and peace.

Now I want to know—what bridges that gulf? How do you get the Peter of the Acts of the Apostles out of the Peter of the Gospels? Is there any way of explaining that revolution of character, whilst yet its broad outlines remain identical, which befell him and all of them, except the old-fashioned one that the *something* which came in between was the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, and the consequent gift of joy and peace in Him, a joy that no troubles or persecutions could shake, a peace that no conflicts could for a moment disturb? It seems to me that every theory of Christianity which boggles at accepting the Resurrection of Jesus Christ as a plain fact, is shattered to pieces on the sharp-pointed rock of this one demand—'Very well! If it is not a fact, account for the existence of the Church, and for the change in the characters of its members.' You may wriggle as you like, but you will never get a

reasonable theory of these two undeniable facts until you believe that He rose from the dead. In His right hand He carried peace, and in His left joy. He gave these to them, and therefore 'out of weakness they were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens,' and when the time came, 'were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection.' There is omnipotent efficacy in Christ's greetings.

The one instance opens up the general law, that His wishes are gifts, that all His words are acts, that He speaks and it is done, and that when He desires for us joy, it is a deed of conveyance and gift, and invests us with the joy that He desires if we observe the conditions.

Christ's wishes are omnipotent, ours are powerless. We wish for our friends many good things, and the event turns wishes to mockery, and the garlands which we prepared for their birthdays have sometimes to be hung on their tombs. The limitations of human friendship and of our deepest and sincerest wishes, like a dark background, enhance the boundless efficacy of the greetings of the Master, which are not only wishes but bestowments of the thing wished, and therein given, by Him.

IV. So, lastly, notice our share in this twofold greeting.

When it was first heard, I suppose that the disciples and the women apprehended the salutation only in its most outward form, and that all other thoughts were lost in the mere rapture of the sudden change from the desolate sense of loss to the glad consciousness of renewed possession. When the women clung to His feet on that Easter morning, they had no

thought of anything but—‘ we clasp Thee again, O Soul of our souls.’ But then, as time went on, the meaning and blessedness and far-reaching issues of the Resurrection became more plain to them. And I think we can see traces of the process, in the development of Christian teaching as presented in the Acts of the Apostles and in the Epistles. Peter in his early sermons dwells on the Resurrection all but exclusively from one point of view—viz., as being the great proof of Christ’s Messiahship. Then there came by degrees, as is represented in the same Peter’s letter, and abundantly in the Apostle Paul’s, the recognition of the light which the Resurrection of Jesus Christ threw upon immortality; as a prophecy and a pattern thereof. Then, when the historical fact had become fully accepted and universally diffused, and its bearings upon men’s future had been as fully apprehended as is possible here, there came, finally, the thought that the Resurrection of Jesus Christ was the symbol of the new life, which from that risen Lord passed into all those who loved and trusted Him.

Now, in all these three aspects—as proof of Messiahship, as the pattern and prophecy of immortality, and as the symbol of the better life which is accessible for us, here and now—the Resurrection of Jesus Christ stands for us even more truly than for the rapturous women who caught His feet, or for the thankful men who looked upon Him in the upper chamber, as the source of peace and of joy.

For, dear brethren, therein is set forth for us the Christ whose work is thereby declared to be finished and acceptable to God, and all sorrow of sin, all guilt, all disturbance of heart and mind by reason of evil passions and burning memories of former iniquity, and

all disturbance of our concord with God, are at once and for ever swept away. If Jesus Christ was 'declared to be the Son of God with power by His Resurrection from the dead,' and if in that Resurrection, as is most surely the case, the broad seal of the divine acceptance is set to the charter of our forgiveness and sonship by the blood of the Cross, then joy and peace come to us from Him and from it.

Again, the resurrection of Jesus Christ sets Him forth before us as the pattern and the prophecy of immortal life. This Samson has taken the gates of the prison-house on His broad shoulders and carried them away, and now no man is kept imprisoned evermore in that darkness. The earthquake has opened the doors and loosened every man's bonds. Jesus Christ hath risen from the dead, and therein not only demonstrated the certainty that life subsists through death, and that a bodily life is possible thereafter, but hath set before all those who give the keeping of their souls into His hands the glorious belief that 'the body of their humiliation shall be' 'changed into the likeness of the body of His glory, according to the working whereby He is able even to subdue all things unto Himself.' Therefore the sorrows of death, for ourselves and for our dear ones, the agitation which it causes, and all its darkness into which we shrink from passing, are swept away when He comes forth from the grave, serene, radiant, and victorious, to die no more, but to dispense amongst us His peace and His joy.

And, again, the risen Christ is the source of a new life drawn from Him and received into the heart by faith in His sacrifice and Resurrection and glory. And if I have, deep-seated in my soul, though it may be in imperfect maturity, that life which is hid with Christ

in God, an inward fountain of gladness, far better than the effervescent, and therefore soon flat, waters of Greek or earthly joy, is mine; and in my inmost being dwells a depth of calm peace which no outward disturbance can touch, any more than the winds that rave along the surface of the ocean affect its unmoved and unsounded abysses. Jesus Christ comes to thee, my brother, weary, distracted, care-laden, sin-laden, sorrowful and fearful. And He says to each of us from the throne what He said in the upper room before the Cross, and on leaving the grave after it, 'My joy will remain in you, and your joy shall be full. My peace I leave to you, My peace I give unto you; not as the world giveth, give I unto you.'

ON THE MOUNTAIN

'Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, into a mountain where Jesus had appointed them. 17. And when they saw Him, they worshipped Him: but some doubted.'—MATT. xxviii. 16, 17.

'After that, He was seen of above five hundred brethren at once.'—1 COR. xv. 6.

To infer an historian's ignorance from his silence is a short and easy, but a rash, method. Matthew has nothing to say of our Lord's appearances in Jerusalem, except in regard to that of the women in the early morning of Easter Day. But it does not follow that he was ignorant of these appearances. Imperfect knowledge may be the explanation; but the scope and design of his Gospel is much more likely to be so. It is emphatically the Gospel of the King of Israel, and it moves, with the exception of the story of the Passion, wholly within the limits of the Galilean ministry. What more probable than that the same motive which

induced Jesus to select the mountain which He had appointed as the scene of this meeting should have induced the Evangelist to pass by all the other manifestations in order to fix upon this one? It was fitting that in Galilee, where He had walked in lowly gentleness, 'kindly with His kind,' He should assume His sovereign authority. It was fitting that in 'Galilee of the Gentiles,' that outlying and despised province, half heathen in the eyes of the narrow-minded Pharisaic Jerusalem, He should proclaim the widening of His kingdom from Israel to all nations.

If we had Matthew's words only, we should suppose that none but the eleven were present on this occasion. But it is obviously the same incident to which Paul refers when he speaks of the appearance to 'five hundred brethren at once.' These were the Galilean disciples who had been faithful in the days of His lowliness, and were thus now assembled to hear His proclamation of exaltation. Apparently the meeting had been arranged beforehand. They came without Him to 'the mountain where Jesus had appointed.' Probably it was the same spot on which the so-called Sermon on the Mount, the first proclamation of the King, had been delivered, and it was naturally chosen to be the scene of a yet more exalted proclamation. A thousand tender memories and associations clustered round the spot. So we have to think of the five hundred gathered in eager expectancy; and we notice how unlike the manner of His coming is to that of the former manifestations. *Then*, suddenly, He became visibly present where a moment before He had been unseen. But *now* He gradually approaches, for the doubting and the worshipping took place 'when they saw Him,' and before 'He came to them.' I suppose

we may conceive of Him as coming down the hill and drawing near to them, and then, when He stands above them, and yet close to them—else the five hundred could not have seen Him ‘at once’—doubts vanish; and they listen with silent awe and love. The words are majestic; all is regal. There is no veiled personality now, as there had been to Mary, and to the two on the road to Emmaus. There is no greeting now, as there had been in the upper chamber; no affording of a demonstration of the reality of His appearance, as there had been to Thomas and to the others. He stands amongst them as the King, and the music of His words, deep as the roll of thunder, and sweet as harpers harping with their harps, makes all comment or paraphrase sound thin and poor. But yet so many great and precious lessons are hived in the words that we must reverently ponder them. The material is so abundant that I can but touch it in the slightest possible fashion. This great utterance of our Lord’s falls into three parts: a great claim, a great commission, a great promise.

I. There is a Great Claim.

‘All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth.’ No words can more absolutely express unconditional, unlimited authority and sovereignty. Mark the variety of the gift—‘all power’; every kind of force, every kind of dominion is in His hands. Mark the sphere of sovereignty—‘in heaven and in earth.’ Now, brethren, if we know anything about Jesus Christ, we know that He made this claim. There is no reason, except the unwillingness of some people to admit that claim, for casting any sort of doubt upon these words, or making any distinction in authority between them and the rest of the words of graciousness which the whole world has taken to its heart. But if He said

this, what becomes of His right to the veneration of mankind, as the Perfect Example of the self-sacrificing, self-oblivious religious life? It is a mystery that I cannot solve, how any man can keep his reverence for Jesus, and refuse to believe that beneath these tremendous words there lies a solemn and solid reality.

Notice, too, that there is implied a definite point of time at which this all-embracing authority was given. You will find in the Revised Version a small alteration in the reading, which makes a great difference in the sense. It reads, 'All power *has been* given'; and that points, as I say, to a definite period. *When* was it given? Let another portion of Scripture answer the question—'Declared to be the Son of God with power, by the resurrection from the dead.' *Then* to the Man Jesus was given authority over heaven and earth. All the early Christian documents concur in this view of the connection between the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and His investiture with this sovereign power. Harken to Paul, 'Became obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross; wherefore God also hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name that is above every name.' Harken to Peter, 'Who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory.' Harken to the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews, 'We see Jesus crowned with glory and honour for the suffering of death.' Harken to John, 'To Him that is the Faithful Witness, and the First-born from the dead, and the Prince of the kings of the earth.' Look with his eyes to the vision of the 'Lamb as it had been slain,' enthroned in the midst of the throne, and say whether this unanimous consent of the earliest Christian teachers is explicable on any reasonable grounds, unless there had been underlying it just the

words of our text, and the Master Himself had taught them that all power was given to Him in heaven and in earth. As it seems to me impossible to account for the existence of the Church if we deny the Resurrection, so it seems to me impossible to account for the faith of the earliest stratum of the Christian Church without the acceptance of some such declaration as this, as having come from the Lord Himself. And so the hands that were pierced with the nails wield the sceptre of the Universe, and on the brows that were wounded and bleeding with the crown of thorns are wreathed the many crowns of universal Kingdom.

But we have further to notice that in this investiture, with 'all power in heaven and on earth,' we have not merely the attestation of the perfection of His obedience, the completeness of His work, and the power of His sacrifice, but that we have also the elevation of Manhood to enthronement with Divinity. For the *new* thing that came to Jesus after His resurrection was that His humanity was taken into, and became participant of, 'the glory which I had with Thee, before the world was.' Then our nature, when perfect and sinless, is so cognate and kindred with the Divine that humanity is capable of being invested with, and bearing, that 'exceeding and eternal weight of glory.' In that elevation of the Man Christ Jesus, we may read a prophecy, that shall not be unfulfilled, of the destiny of all those who conform to Him through faith, love, and obedience, finally to sit down with Him on His throne, even as He is set down with the Father on His throne.

Ah! brethren, Christianity has dark and low views of human nature, and men say they are too low and too dark. It is 'Nature's sternest painter,' and, there-

fore, 'its best.' But if on its palette the blacks are blacker than anywhere else, its range of colour is greater, and its white is more lustrous. No system thinks so condemnatorily of human nature as it is; none thinks so glowingly of human nature as it may become. There are bass notes far down beyond the limits of the scale to which ears dulled by the world and sin and sorrow are sensitive; and there are clear, high tones, thrilling and shrilling far above the range of perception of such ears. The man that is in the lowest depths may rise with Jesus to the highest, but it must be by the same road by which the Master went. 'If we suffer with Him, we shall also reign with Him,' and only 'if.' There is no other path to the Throne but the Cross. *Via crucis, via lucis*—the way of the Cross is the way of light. It is to those who have accepted their Gethsemanes and their Calvarys that He appoints a kingdom, as His Father has appointed unto Him.

So much, then, for the first point here in these words; turn now to the second.

II. The Great Commission.

One might have expected that the immediate inference to be drawn from 'All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth' would have been some word of encouragement and strengthening to those who were so soon to be left, and who were beginning to be conscious of their feebleness. But there is nothing more striking in the whole of the incidents of those forty days than the prominence which is given in them to the work of the Church when the Master had left it, and to the imperative obligations devolving upon it. And so here, not encouragement, but obligation is the inference that is drawn from that tremendous claim.

'Because I have all power, therefore you are charged with the duty of winning the world for its King.' The all-ruling Christ calls for the universal proclamation of His sovereignty by His disciples. These five hundred little understood the sweep of the commandment, and, as history shows, terribly failed to apprehend the emancipating power of it. But He says to us, as to them, 'I am not content with the authority given to Me by God, unless I have the authority that each man for himself can give Me, by willing surrender of his heart and will to Me.' Jesus Christ craves no empty rule, no mere elevation by virtue of Divine supremacy, over men. He regards that elevation as incomplete without the voluntary surrender of men to become His subjects and champions. Without its own consent He does not count that His universal power is established in a human heart. Though that dominion be all-embracing like the ocean, and stretching into all corners of the universe, and dominating over all ages, yet in that ocean there may stand up black and dry rocks, barren as they are dry, and blasted as they are black, because, with the awful power of a human will, men have said, 'We will not have this Man to reign over us.' It is willing subjects whom Christ seeks, in order to make the Divine grant of authority a reality.

In that work He needs His servants. The gift of God notwithstanding, the power of His Cross notwithstanding, the perfection and completeness of His great reconciling and redeeming work notwithstanding, all these are vain unless we, His servants, will take them in our hands as our weapons, and go forth on the warfare to which He has summoned us. This is the command laid upon us all, 'Make disciples of all

nations.' Only so will the reality correspond to the initial and all-embracing grant.

It would take us too far to deal at all adequately, or in anything but the most superficial fashion, with the remaining parts of this great commission. 'Make disciples of all nations'—that is the first thing. Then comes the second step: 'Baptizing them into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.' Who are to be baptized? Now, notice, if I may venture upon being slightly technical for a moment, that the word 'nations' in the preceding clause is a neuter one, and that the word for 'them' in this clause is a masculine, which seems to me fairly to imply that the command 'baptizing them' does not refer to 'all nations,' but to the disciples latent among them, and to be drawn from them. Surely, surely the great claim of absolute and unbounded power has for its consequence something better than the lame and impotent conclusion of appointing an indiscriminate rite, as the means of making disciples! Surely that is not in accordance with the spirituality of the Christian faith!

'Baptizing them into the Name'—the name is one, that of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Does that mean the name of God, and of a man, and of an influence, all jumbled up together in blasphemous and irrational union? Surely, if Father, Son, and Holy Spirit have one name, the name of Divinity, then it is but a step to say that three Persons are one God! But there is a great deal more here than a baptismal formula, for to be baptized into the Name is but the symbol of being plunged into communion with this one threefold God of our salvation. The ideal state of the Christian disciple is that he shall be as a vase

dropped into the Atlantic, encompassed about with God, and filled with Him. We all 'live, and move, and have our being' in Him, but some of us have so wrapped ourselves, if I may venture to use such a figure, in waterproof covering, that, though we are floating in an ocean of Divinity, not a drop finds its way in. Cast the covering aside, and you will be saturated with God, and only in the measure in which you live and move and have your being in the Name are you disciples.

There is another step still. Making disciples and bringing into communion with the Godhead is not all that is to flow from, and correspond to, and realise in the individual, the absolute authority of Jesus Christ—'Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.' We hear a great deal in these days about the worthlessness of mere dogmatic Christianity. Jesus Christ anticipated all that talk, and guarded it from exaggeration. For what He tells us here that we are to train ourselves and others in, is not creed but conduct; not things to be believed or *credenda* but things to be done or *agenda*—'teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.' A creed that is not wrought out in actions is empty; conduct that is not informed, penetrated, regulated by creed, is unworthy of a man, not to say of a Christian. What we are to know we are to know in order that we may do, and so inherit the benediction, which is never bestowed upon them that know, but upon them that, knowing these things, are blessed *in*, as well as *for*, the doing of them.

That training is to be continuous, educating to new views of duty; new applications of old truths, new sensitiveness of conscience, unveiling to us, ever as we climb, new heights to which we aspire. The Christian

Church has not yet learnt—thank God it is learning, though by slow degrees—all the moral and practical implications and applications of ‘the truth as it is in Jesus.’ And so these are the three things by which the Church recognises and corresponds to the universal dominion of Christ, the making disciples universally; the bringing them into the communion of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; and the training of them to conduct ever approximating more and more to the Divine ideal of humanity in the glorified Christ.

And now I must gather just into a sentence or two what is to be said about the last point. There is—

III. The Great Promise.

‘I am with you always, even unto the end of the world,’ or, as it might be read, ‘with you all the days, even to the accomplishment of the age.’ Note that emphatic ‘I am,’ which does not only denote certainty, but is the speech of Him who is lifted above the lower regions where Time rolls and the succession of events occurs. That ‘I am’ covers all the varieties of *was, is, will be*. Notice the long vista of variously tinted days which opens here. Howsoever many they be, howsoever different their complexion, days of summer and days of winter, days of sunshine and days of storm, days of buoyant youth and days of stagnant, stereotyped old age, days of apparent failure and days of apparent prosperity, He is with us in them all. They change, He is ‘the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever.’ Notice the illimitable extent of the promise—‘even unto the end.’ We are always tempted to think that long ago the earth was more full of God than it is to-day, and that away forward in the future it will again be fuller, but that this moment is comparatively empty. The heavens touch the earth on the horizon

in front and behind, and they are highest and remotest above us just where we stand. But no past day had more of Christ in it than to-day has, and that He has gone away is the condition of His coming. 'He therefore departed for a season, that we might receive Him for ever.'

But mark that the promise comes after a command, and is contingent, for all its blessedness and power, upon our obedience to the prescribed duty. That duty is primarily to make disciples of all nations, and the discharge of it is so closely connected with the realisation of the promise that a non-missionary Church never has much of Christ's presence. But obedience to all the King's commands is required if we stand before Him, and are to enjoy His smile. If you wish to keep Christ very near you, and to feel Him with you, the way to do so is no mere cultivation of religious emotion, or saturating your mind with religious books and thoughts, though these have their place; but on the dusty road of life doing His will and keeping His commandments. 'If a man love Me he will keep My words, and My Father will love Him. We will come to Him, and make our abode with Him.'

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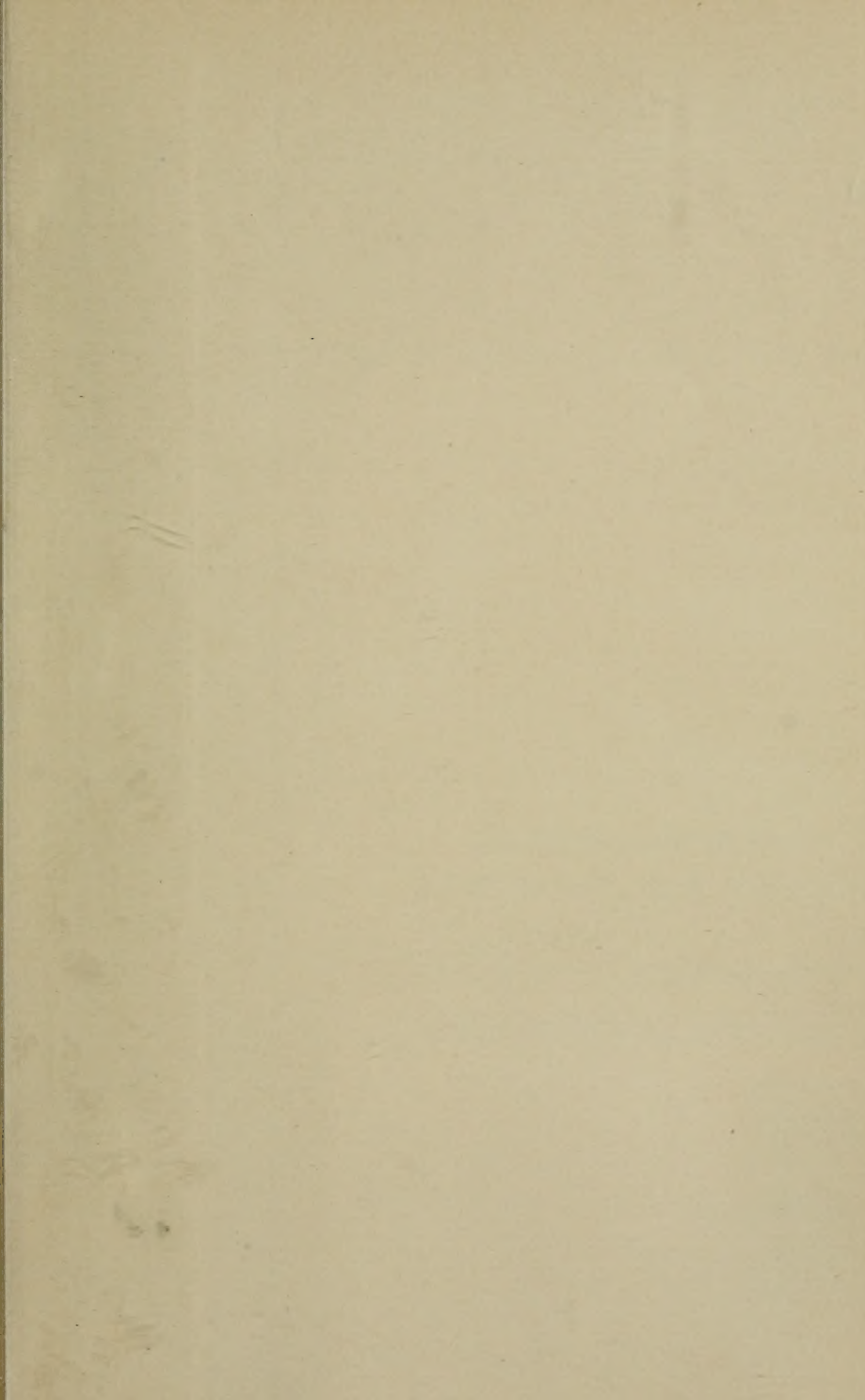
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